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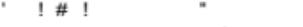
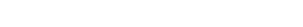
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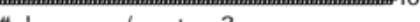
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sacrifice cannot remain unfinished, he must complete it. He becomes the *r̄si*, the seer, the poet, the priest. Now he is the whole sacrifice: "Man is the sacrifice."<sup>121</sup>

Śunahṣepa is Man, the victim of destiny—of the Gods, of society, of human privilege and power. He is the average Man, the Man of this exploited, starving, enslaved, alienated majority present since the world began, the victim of the sacrifice. He is the poor Man called "a dog's penis." But he is also—and here we find all the ambivalence of the sacred—the victim who by his sacrifice gives life. He is the savior, the pure one, the one who pays, because he is the only one who has the wherewithal, something to pay with: his life. Śunahṣepa is the one who atones for and redeems the powerful, the nobles, warriors, rich men, men of action, and all the Rohitas of the world. He is the true Brahmin, the real priest—the "royal" priest, not a class or a caste, but an ordinary human being with an unembellished humanness who truly mediates between the Gods and the rest of the world.

Some have preferred to see in Śunahṣepa a fettered solar divinity.<sup>122</sup> He thus becomes a cosmic figure fastened to the triple rooted<sup>123</sup> cosmic tree.<sup>124</sup> It is not for us to interpret Śunahṣepa by way of a full-blown hypothesis on Vedic divinities. Our human interpretation is valuable for the myth in itself, even if the cosmic and solar hypothesis should prove accurate.

*Rohita*—After Śunahṣepa, Rohita is the richest character in the myth. His name itself is significant. It means "the reddish one," a double reference to the sun (often called by this name), and to the earth ("the red"). Rohita, like *adamat*, means the reddish inhabitant of earth—the active man par excellence.<sup>125</sup> He incarnates historical Man, the one who makes history, *Homo activus*.

If Śunahṣepa is the Man marked by destiny, who bears his burden by sacred calling, Rohita is preeminently the secular Man, the one who chooses, who finds himself confronted by life-or-death options. He is the Man of will, especially of a will to life. The passivity and nonviolence of the Brahmin Śunahṣepa contrasts with the activity and aggression of the *kṣatriya* Rohita.

Rohita is born of an impossibility. He is an exception. Even a hundred wives could not engender him. Likewise, human life is the exception in nature, because it realizes the minimum probability. Life is indeed a gift, but we take possession of it, we refuse to give it back; it is too precious, too exceptional. There is a Rohita in everyone.

The life of Rohita is an obstacle course run around death. He flees death and runs in the opposite direction. In childhood, his father decides for him; later, he himself says no! and goes to live in the forest. He cannot live among Men because he fears they may recognize him, trap him. But his fear does not paralyze him; he is ready to take up his bow and assume his responsibilities; he slinks only from death. When he hears talk of his father's affliction, he is prepared to go to him; but every time he is about to yield to filial piety, Indra appears in the form of a Brahmin and counsels him not to bury himself in his kingdom, not to go home to his village. He must wander like the sun: *Homo viator!* Has he succumbed to temptation or followed good advice? We cannot answer this question without denying its validity (as we shall see a little later).

Rohita's first act once he reaches the age of reason is to say no, and leave for the forest. This "no" is not a mere figure of speech. Rohita does not justify himself; he argues with nobody.

<sup>121</sup> *SB* I.3.2.1 (the citation that opens this chapter).

<sup>122</sup> See L. Silburn, *Instant et cause* (Paris: Vrin, 1955), 23n4, 29–30.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>125</sup> Both the Semitic and Sanskrit roots have the same meaning: "red," and refer to both Man and earth.

He says no, picks up his bow, and escapes. This "no" is repeated successively throughout his wandering life; the five times he seems ready to give in, his no is reinforced by Indra's arguments. What is Man? The *ascetic* of life, the animal who says no?<sup>126</sup> Is he the *rebel* in the universe, the one who collapses under the burden of his humanity?<sup>127</sup> Is he the *itinerant*, not yet mature enough or wise enough to accept human contingency?<sup>128</sup>

In any case, Rohita's life gravitates around this no. It is a no to death, but also to obedience and submission. Does he say no to *dharma* and ultimately to *rta*? Or does he only repudiate tradition's burden and ultimately injustice?

In the first case, Rohita is a blasphemer: in order to save his own skin he defies the cosmic order, tries to avoid it, and finally coerces Ajigarta to sell his son. But the narrative gives no clue that would permit this interpretation. Not a single line pronounces judgment against Rohita. His actions appear irreproachable. Such a hermeneutic is also impossible given the Indic context of our story. The *kṣatriya* (as we read in the *Gita*) must dedicate his own life to protecting others.<sup>129</sup>

In the second case, Rohita is the hero of our myth; he represents Man, the reddish one, the earthly, the secular one, who, bow in hand, confronts the static, petrified tradition and tries to free himself from the Gods' crushing grip. It is hardly surprising, then, that he should choose a Brahmin, the living incarnation of tradition, as his substitute. From this angle, Rohita represents mankind, which, now of age and therefore freed from paternal tutelage, seeks to protect itself by taking in hand its own destiny.

It is important, however, that we do not see Rohita's attempts at emancipation as a revolution in the modern sense of the word. Rohita does not revolt against his father, nor does he rebel against the Gods. He is not a Prometheus struggling against Zeus. Rohita denounces nothing and nobody. Throughout the narrative there is an atmosphere of serenity that prevents Rohita from being turned into a Western-style prophet like Jonah, for example. He says no, and afterward keeps silent, flees, and tries to defend himself.

Rohita is spared death, but he also misses true life. The silence of the text is highly significant. There is nothing more to say about Rohita; he lived to escape death and in this he succeeded, but is this evasion authentic life? Nevertheless, emancipation remains a central consideration to which we shall return.

*Hariścandra*—Hariścandra, who in later legend appears frequently, is here a peculiar, rather eclipsed character. We shall outline only the basic traits that characterize his role. Hariścandra has only one wish: to have a son and keep him alive. He symbolizes the longing for immortality, represented in this case by the yearning for a male descendant. He wants to continue living; he knows he himself cannot exhaust all the vitality he possesses. He still has projects to realize, dreams to dream, pleasures to experience, powers to exercise. Hariścandra is the man for whom life is too short, or too full. He cannot live by halves, nor leave any desire unsatisfied. He needs to prolong his life. It is the son who continues the life of the father, and so saves him. Hariścandra has sentiments that are common to everyone. He embarks on an enterprise without knowing how he will ever get out of it, and when he finds himself driven

<sup>126</sup> See Max Scheler, *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: E. Cohen, 1923), etc.

<sup>127</sup> See Albert Camus, *L'homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951).

<sup>128</sup> See Gabriel Marcel, *Homo viator* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), and the essay on Camus's *L'homme révolté* in the appendix of the 1963 edition.

<sup>129</sup> BG 11.31–38: "Hold pleasure and pain, profit and loss, victory and defeat to be the same: then brace yourself for the fight. So you will bring no evil upon yourself" (38) (R. C. Zaehner, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* [London: Oxford, 1969]).

into a corner, he continually puts off any decision. He wants only to avoid the humiliation of not having an heir.

Hariścandra cannot escape the destiny he has forged for himself. He falls ill because he does not keep his promise to offer his son in sacrifice to Varuṇa. He has power, but not freedom; he is a king, possesses a kingdom, but he is sick and impotent.

It is significant that later tradition has focused the myth more and more on Hariścandra, nearly forgetting the other characters. Does this indicate merely a change in the social climate favoring the monarchy, to which the court scribes bear witness? We might instead venture two hypotheses. The first is the tendency to convert tragedy into drama. Although the myth may not have the literary form of a tragedy, it presents certain tragic elements. Śunahśepa and Rohita are seized by destiny; they represent Man; they incarnate us, each in his fashion. On the other hand, the legends of Hariścandra are dramas. Hariścandra is a king; we regard him, even pity him, but only from a distance. He is not us. We cannot identify with him.

Our second hypothesis would be that while the mythic strength of Śunahśepa and Rohita has remained buried over the centuries, only to blossom in our own day, the evocative strength of the drama surrounding Hariścandra, the nobleman with his faith in Man and the Gods, was more in tune with the atmosphere of past eras. Hariścandra would therefore be the hero of a bygone social order.

*Ajigarta*—Ajigarta, the text tells us, was starving. Hunger is a poor counselor, but also a valid excuse. He should nevertheless have been content with selling his son, but he seems to have acquired a taste for silver. He comes forward a second, then a third time, to bind and to sacrifice Śunahśepa, in return for which he adds to his riches. While Hariścandra wants a son at all costs, Ajigarta is far from concerned about keeping his. Certainly, he has two other sons, but, as Śunahśepa himself reproaches him, choosing three hundred cows over the life of his son is unthinkable, even among people of the lowest class. Ajigarta the Brahmin behaves worse than a *sūdra*. The value of a person is measured here by his acts, not by his birth. This is rather a revolutionary vision for a society on the way to petrifying its caste system.

It is worth emphasizing that the myth speaks of the sin of Ajigarta, and even of an unforgivable act. His own son accuses him. In later tradition, however, the great code of Manu justifies acts committed in order to save life that is threatened by starvation and even cites Ajigarta as a pertinent example: Ajigarta, suffering from hunger, comes close to sacrificing his son, but he committed no sin, since he sought to cure hunger.<sup>130</sup>

We can see here the radical change in judgment when the ontological regime we have thus far considered becomes the juridical regime of the *sastras*. In this latter world, Ajigarta's action is not considered sinful—and many a court of justice would probably agree with Manu (at least regarding the first hundred cows). In the realm of ontological sacrifice, on the other hand, which is the context of our myth, Ajigarta is the villain, the traitor who is necessary in order to complete the sacrifice. In a way, he is the true high priest of the sacrifice—the "hangman," and in another sense he is the "victim" who makes it possible. Śunahśepa is the victim immolated for Men, which is why he is spared and does not die. Rohita is, in a certain sense, the victim chosen by the Gods and the victim of circumstances, who is also saved by Śunahśepa, but Ajigarta is the true victim, the one who is not spared. He is the victim of cosmic destiny, *ra*, and is condemned without pardon. And yet it is Ajigarta who, as Śunahśepa's father—but above all thanks to his triple acceptance—renders the sacrifice possible. Is there not in every sacrifice an irreducible, unpardonable element that cannot be integrated into the sacrifice and that is precisely what makes the sacrifice possible? It seems there must be a

<sup>130</sup> *Manu* X.105.

sin, hence a sinner, a fall, a disorder at the origin of any sacrifice. There appears even to be an originating fault at the origin of the universe itself.<sup>131</sup> Woe to he who brings the stumbling block, cursed is he who commits the crime, or causes it, but through his sin, by his crime, deliverance comes and the sacrifice is effective. Ajigarta represents the ontological condition for sacrifice, the act for which no reparation is possible. He is both the stumbling block and the starting block. Thanks to his sin, virtue triumphs.

*Viśvāmitra*—Viśvāmitra is one of the most famous *r̄ṣis* of the *Vedas*, and the author of the *Gīyātri*; this *kṣatriya* (or even, according to some, this *śīdra*), who merits the rank of Brahmin<sup>132</sup> thanks to his ascetic practices, here plays a double role. On the one hand, he represents the liturgical and sacred element, the complete sacerdotal order in its dimension of charisma and institution. He is the Man of rite, of sacred history. Despite the abomination of human sacrifice, he and his fellow priests cannot ignore the vitality of sacrifice and implore Śunahṣepa to continue the ceremony after he is no longer its victim. One can neither interrupt the sacrifice nor leave it unfinished, as the "rubrics" of practically all religious traditions tell us.<sup>133</sup>

On the other hand, Viśvāmitra is the man of the establishment, of history. He not only adopts Śunahṣepa but installs him as the eldest of his sons, the chief of the *gotra*, the clans that make up the elite of the āryan race. We may speak of the unity between sacred and profane, or of the continuum between sacred history and secular history, or of the institutional and charismatic character of the priesthood; in any case, Viśvāmitra stands for sacred and historical continuity, as the whole tradition surrounding this Vedic seer confirms.

*Vasiṣṭha*—Vasiṣṭha, the great Brahmin and foe of Viśvāmitra, hardly appears in our story. Important as he is in other contexts, here he is only considered from a "historical" and "naturalistic" point of view. According to this exegesis, everything is reduced to a political plot by Vasiṣṭha to inherit Hariscandra's kingdom: as the royal priest, he first suggested the vow to the king and then, clothed as Indra, tried to dissuade Rohita from going back.<sup>134</sup>

*The People*—Although these five characters may be the myth's central figures, all of mankind is also represented.

*The women* have what is best described as a background role: the hundred wives of Hariscandra and the mother of Śunahṣepa are mentioned, but Rohita's mother is not identified.<sup>135</sup>

The two Brahmins, Parvata and Nārada, are the voice of pure orthodoxy. It is Nārada who expounds the traditional doctrine of immortality and who advises the king to appeal to Varuṇa by promising to offer his son in sacrifice. It is Nārada who tells us of the incest between animals in order to obtain descendants and of the traditional notion of human debts.

The names of the three other priests officiating at the sacrifice are also mentioned. Viśvāmitra is the oblate; Vasiṣṭha, his traditional enemy, plays the role of Brahman;<sup>136</sup> and Jamadagni is the acolyte. The liturgical, sacramental, and sacred setting is thus complete.

<sup>131</sup> See the creative sacrifice of Prajīpati in chapter IV.

<sup>132</sup> See *Mānas* VII.42.

<sup>133</sup> With this in mind, see the rather revolutionary injunction of Mt 5:23–24.

<sup>134</sup> See E. E. Pargiter, *Viśvāmitra*, *art. cit.*, who despite his customary scholarship betrays here the spirit of his time by refusing to accept any truth found in myth unless it is historical.

<sup>135</sup> Given this silence, I am not concluding—as is so often done in similar circumstances—that Rohita's birth is somehow "supernatural." The text does not mention whether Hariscandra had daughters. We might suppose he did have, however, since nothing in the story implies either the impotence of the king or the sterility of his wives. The myth takes place in the realm of the normal.

<sup>136</sup> These two traditional enemies are here in full accord, a fact of interest with regard to both chronology and the location of the myth in the complex of Vedic relationships.

Śunahśepa's two brothers are also mentioned. Their presence emphasizes both Śunahśepa's solitude (he is alone, he is not the favorite, he has not been saved by his parents like his brothers) and his ties with the community (he is one of the sons of Ajigarta, a "young man from a good family").

Finally, history is represented by the hundred and one sons of Viśvāmitra. Here, as in any historical context, we have a division into two groups: the elders who are cursed by their father for not accepting Śunahśepa, and the younger ones who are blessed and from whom the pure clans of the āryan race will descend. It is very clear here that the origin of castes "beyond the pale" lies in disobedience and a curse; the *dasyu*, slaves, or non-āryans are also descendants of Viśvāmitra. The myth seems to be attempting to justify history and sociology, so it emphasizes the fact that both āryans and non-āryans are sons of the same father. Here is myth seeking to vindicate history.

### *The Gods*

The human condition is not complete if it does not include the mysterious forces that envelop human life. In this myth we find three very significant patterns of divine intervention.

*Varuṇa*—Varuṇa, the great God of the *Rg Veda*, is the supreme lord of life and death, who watches over all living beings. Now, since every human birth changes the universal status quo, Man must reestablish the balance that his existence has disrupted. In Vedic terms:

Human life carries with it a fourfold obligation on the part of the new being toward all reality, a debt that accompanies him throughout life.<sup>137</sup> These obligations are not the results of chance, but are constitutive of human life: the debt to the Gods, to the *r̄sis*, to the ancestors, and to mankind. Accordingly, he offers sacrifice (to cooperate with the Gods in sustaining the world), studies the *Vedas* (to acquire wisdom and so live a full life), prolongs the life he has received—that is, has children (each of us is the link between our ancestors and our descendants)—and finally, welcomes his contemporaries and practices hospitality and the other civic virtues (without which life would be a failure).<sup>138</sup>

It is in this context that we must understand the role of Varuṇa. Rohita's birth, like any human birth, is the fruit of a longing and a natural improbability. Man does not belong to the Gods as if he were some sort of private property of which they may dispose at will. *Rta*, cosmic order, governs the dynamism of all reality. Man belongs to the entire universe. The Gods also have their role—a divine role—to play. Varuṇa, the guardian of *rta*, enters our story not as a capricious and powerful sovereign; he does not take the initiative—he simply agrees to Hariścandra's proposition. He does not accept Hariścandra's promise in order to test him, tempt him, or toy with him by putting him in an impossible situation. Varuṇa is not an anthropomorphic God. In spite of Śunahśepa's prayer, it is not Varuṇa who delivers him. He does not have to justify himself before Men, nor explain death and evil to them. As lord of the cosmic order, he knows very well that human life is transitory and that it must be offered in sacrifice. The mystery of life is the mystery of solidarity, and the law of *karma* is always in the background. Each of us has to face our own *karma*. Rohita must die like any man; so must Śunahśepa. Only the manner of death differs. In this common destiny, the real state of things, which is normally unseen, becomes visible. Varuṇa is but its living symbol.

*Indra*—Indra always appears as a God who strikes, but this time he does not strike with his *vajra*, his thunderbolt, but with his unexpected intervention, which brings to light an

<sup>137</sup> See the notion of *r̄ta*, debt, duty, obligation (see the Latin *reus*). The root *r̄i* (going, movement) denotes that dynamism called forth by an omission or "privation."

<sup>138</sup> See for example *SB* I.7.2.1–5; III.6.2.16.

important aspect of this sacred story. Rohita refuses five consecutive times to return home so that Hariscandra might keep his promise to Varuṇa and be cured. The temptation, if we can call it that, does not come from demons, but from God. Rohita never feels compelled. Indra takes human form precisely in order to let Rohita choose for himself. Rohita does not have to decide between filial duty and divine command. He must decide by virtue of his own convictions. Nevertheless, Indra seems opposed to the justice that is owed to Varuṇa. In a monolithic conception of divinity, temptation would come only from the devil, but then where does the devil come from? In a pluralistic conception of divinity (not to be confounded with so-called polytheistic plurality), temptation comes from the very core of divinity. Yet temptation is certainly not an evil *per se*, and Man must recognize in it an immense potential to be developed. Temptation is not a trap; neither is it a sort of low blow from an enemy. Temptation is intrinsic to life; it belongs to the very nature of things and to divinity; it is at once the test and the proof; it offers different courses of action and confronts us with the full constitutive ambivalence of the human situation. It thus creates a space where the human will can unfold. This is not the function of an evil spirit, but of God himself. Such is Indra's role in our story.

The temptation instigated by Indra is the ordeal all adults must undergo in making decisions. Death lurks everywhere. Can we escape it? In the village, at home, death is certain; but in the forest, life is not a human life. Clearly, the true *śāmyāśin* must forsake the village, even if his father is dying, and even if he, the son, has caused it. The exigency of the absolute is absolute. Indra offers Rohita the opportunity to convert his evasion into a sublimation. Let us examine this more closely.

Although the narrative of the *sūtra*, which postdates the *Brahmāna* version, speaks of yet a sixth encounter with Indra, the five temptations of our text offer an interesting typology of human ordeals, and consequently of what Man is.<sup>139</sup>

The key theme is always pilgrimage, movement: "Move on, move on!" The leitmotif of all Indra's interventions is to emphasize that action, the life of wandering, of continual pilgrimage—in a word, dynamism—is superior to all static conformity. Let us briefly recall the situation: Rohita is conscience-struck and decides to return to his father and face his destiny. Indra, disguised as a Brahmin, goes to meet him and convinces him otherwise; he must continue to live, to wander, to follow his path.<sup>140</sup>

The reasons on which the five temptations are founded are different in substance. The first is based on the superiority of the *śāmyāśin* and asceticism over everyday life, because "he who chooses to live among Men does wrong." This is the traditional motivation, and to lend weight to his argument Indra refers to *śruti*, revelation. He does not suggest disobedience, but loyalty to tradition.

The second temptation goes a step further. Liberation is not easy; Man is a sinner and must be redeemed. All his efforts must be directed to this end. Personal salvation is the supreme law.

The third temptation puts forward a reason that appears more egoistic, but in the end may also be more profound. Life is not merely a struggle to purify oneself of sin, but a chance to fully realize oneself, make one's fortune, prevent one's talents from being wasted without ever coming to fruition. In order to do this they must be advanced diligently. Human fullness

<sup>139</sup> In *SSS* the order is also different (1, 3, 4, 2, 5 and a sixth verse). I am well aware that one cannot construct theories on texts that are more or less contingent. On the other hand, neither need we have recourse to a collective unconscious in order to justify this interpretation. I am basing it on the contents of the texts, without insisting on the order of the five temptations.

<sup>140</sup> See the arguments Kṛṣṇa uses in *BG* II and III to convince Arjuna he ought to fight.

does not come to us without effort, just by sitting and waiting. We must move along; we must go to meet our salvation.

The fourth temptation may be explained with either a cosmic or a social argument.<sup>141</sup> From the former point of view, there are four cosmic ages. Our conduct can reflect each of these ages or it can condition them. If Rohita wants to model himself on the age of *kali*, the worst of all, he can relax and do just as he likes; if, on the contrary, he chooses to express the best age, he must keep active. In other words, in order to collaborate with cosmic history, each of us must step beyond individualistic problems and awaken to our cosmic vocation. If, on the other hand, it refers only to a game of dice, this reason seems much like the first, and could be interpreted as symbolizing the different qualities of human life.

The fifth temptation seems to combine human, personal, even egoistical elements with the dynamism of the universe, represented by the sun, constantly active, constantly journeying, the happiest of beings. Man goes on his way together with the seasons and the stars.

Must we call these temptations? Has Rohita done well to listen to them? Has he acted according to *dharma* or not? Should he not have gone back to the village immediately to keep the promise made to Varuṇa and save his father from his afflictions? Here again the myth is original and, indeed, scarcely intelligible outside the Indic context.

In order to understand, we must consider the symbolism of Varuṇa and Indra. They stand for the two poles of the divine. Varuṇa is called the ethical God, the one who sees, scrutinizes, judges, and pardons the actions of Men, the one whom nothing escapes. Varuṇa represents justice and truth, the internal correlation of things (*rta*) and at the same time forgiveness, that is, the power to restore the broken order. Indra, on the contrary, stands for power, warlike strength, and victorious force, the one who liberates and delivers from enemies. If Varuṇa is the moral God par excellence, Indra is the prototype of the one "beyond good and evil." Varuṇa is King<sup>142</sup> by virtue of his intimate relation with the cosmic order, because of his fidelity and his pardon. Indra is King because he is the victor in celestial and earthly battles.

What is Man? The nexus, the *kṣetra* or battlefield between the two most powerful symbols of the divine in the *Rg Veda*: Indra and Varuṇa. Without going into Indological detail, we can sum it up as follows: There is in Man a constitutive tension between the development of his personality, his own life, and his integration with the cosmos, with society. Man is made from this tension between loyalty to the social and cosmic order and authenticity toward himself. Which must he obey? What must Rohita do? The conflict takes place within him; the Gods are interiorized in this case, since he sees only his father's life in danger and his own threatened. So Rohita moves on until he finds a substitute. Has he done well? Can we reconcile Indra with Varuṇa? Rohita is powerless, but there is Sunahṣepa, the mediator, and there is prayer, the transhuman dimension in life. It is from all these characters combined that the web of life is spun.

The *Vedic pantheon* plays an important role in this myth. Varuṇa has agreed to accept Sunahṣepa as the substitute for Rohita, and the boy is to be sacrificed during the *rājasūya*. But then, just as the rite is being celebrated, the victim cries out for deliverance. Who can save him? Should he not resign himself to a higher order of things? Should someone not die in order to save the king, the kingdom, and the world? Is there any justifiable escape? Here too our myth is revealing. Sunahṣepa's oration is not a prayer of resignation or an acceptance of

<sup>141</sup> That is, are we talking about the four ages of the world (Max Müller, A. Weber) or a simple dice game (A. B. Keith)? An argument in favor of the latter view is that the four *yugas* or cosmic cycles are not Vedic. See Keith, *h.l.*, etc.

<sup>142</sup> *MaitS* I.6.11; II.2.1; *TB* II.5.7.6; etc.

superior divine will. He is unaware of his redemptive mission; he does not consciously reflect on the value of his act. His hands are bound; prayer is all that is left to him. The emphasis here is not on Śunahśepa's personal power as a savior, but on the suprahuman power of prayer. Prayer is presented as the art of the impossible. If you pray for something that is possible for you to obtain, then should you not rather be busy obtaining it? Nor is prayer a matter of projecting a psychological anthropomorphism into the superhuman world, of appealing to a particular God or a saint in order to thwart the influence of another "supernatural" being. Śunahśepa does not dream of winning the favor of one God against another. True prayer is not an instrument of power, or a weapon. He does not even ask that justice be done, as if it were unjust to die for others or to be sacrificed; prayer does not judge.

The whole situation takes place on another plane altogether. It concerns freedom. True freedom does not mean choosing between alternatives that, once made, would deprive us of other freedoms. The realm of choice is the world of *karma*. *Karma* is subject to human decision, but once this decision is exercised it is inexorable and follows a *sui generis* law of causality.<sup>143</sup> The sphere of true freedom lies outside the causal, rational, or karmic structure of the world; it does not contradict these earthly structures, but it oversteps them by far. The sphere of freedom is the sphere of hope against all hope, the sphere of the impossible, the incomprehensible, and nonmanipulable. Śunahśepa wants to know if he has any chance of being freed, because freedom is the supreme value. His liberation is from every point of view impossible. Here is where prayer intervenes; here and only here is its proper place.

We see now why Śunahśepa appeals to the Gods one after another. He begins by invoking Prajāpati, Lord of all the Gods. He asks to be delivered to Aditi, the personification of freedom, the limitless; he prays for release from his bonds, and to see heaven and earth, father and mother once again.<sup>144</sup> Prajāpati refers him to Agni, the God nearest to the celestial inhabitants and to mortals, the high priest of sacrifice, and the boy repeats his prayer for freedom. The entire celestial world hears Śunahśepa's oration, but there is no favoritism here. Prayer is not a privilege, but a higher activity of the spirit that unlocks a new degree of freedom and makes possible what is ordinarily impossible. Obviously this is not an ontological impossibility that is surpassed by prayer. Prayer is not a secret power that the man of prayer can use, like a weapon, when the moment comes. This would be magic, or at least some other power that has nothing to do with prayer. True prayer is uncertain, and it is unaware of its power. We do not know; the Gods themselves do not know. Nothing is prearranged, there are no rules in the world of prayer. Its reality is constantly new; the mandate of prayer is pure spontaneity, and to congeal it leads to idolatry. Śunahśepa is, so to speak, carried away by the spirit of prayer; he tirelessly implores the Gods one after another, each time according to the directions he receives. Agni quite naturally redirects him to Savitṛ, the great inciter, who alone might impart him the necessary inspiration. And Savitṛ counsels him to address Varuṇa, since it is Varuṇa who had him bound (something Śunahśepa did not know). A first circle completes. Śunahśepa sings one of the most beautiful prayers of the *Rg Veda* to Varuṇa, who sends him again to the God of sacrifice, Agni. But Agni can do nothing all alone (we are beyond any voluntarism), and must this time induce Śunahśepa to call on the All-Gods, *viśve-devāḥ*.

<sup>143</sup> *Sui generis* since we cannot summarily reduce the karmic process to Aristotelian categories and still less to modern scientific chains of causality.

<sup>144</sup> See *RV* I.24.1: Aditi, translated by freedom, also means infinite, without boundaries or limits, the integrality of all being. In the *RV* she is usually personified and divinized.

One particular deity has been involved in the adventure all along, and has not yet been specially invoked as he ought to be. This is why the All-Gods tell Śunahṣepa to address himself to Indra. A second circle completes. Indra offers a chariot of gold to poor Śunahṣepa, but he wants his freedom. So he entreats Indra once more, who answers by telling him to sing the praises of the twin precursors of light, the Aśvins. Indra directs him to where cosmic newness meets first light: Uṣas, Aurora, the dawn, ever new and unforeseeable, an innovation never repeated, for today is never a mere repetition of yesterday. God is not pure inactivity. Each day the creation is renewed and runs the absolutely incalculable risk of whatever will come of it. And with each verse that Śunahṣepa sings to the breaking day, to Uṣas, one of his three bonds falls away. The first light of the new day sets him free.

### *The Cosmos*

Hariścandra is a king and, consequently, has a kingdom. He is not an isolated individual but a point of convergence, so to speak: the apex of an order of reality. His entire kingdom is engaged in the adventure, as we learn in the later tradition that speaks of the aerial city of *saubha*. Yet the cosmos of the original myth is not a fantastic world; it is neither anthropomorphized nor divinized. Things are as they are. Nature is neither spiritualized nor allegorized. The forest is the forest, and hunger is hunger. The cows are real and have their full value: one hundred cows are well worth a human life.<sup>145</sup> The cosmos here does not overwhelm the other domains of reality. The cosmotheandric equilibrium is carefully maintained. Things are in their proper place; there is no need to make them play an unfamiliar role, which would in any case be secondary. As we have said, this myth of the human condition is centered first and foremost on Man. So it naturally presents a cosmos seen from Man's point of view. It tells us of honey and the delicious Udumbara fruit, and also mentions the village, constantly enticing for its rich human relationships.

The vision of the cosmos is quite detailed: human procreation is described fastidiously (even the ten lunar months of gestation are mentioned), as are food, dress, and riches. The sacrificial altar, knife, and fire are also mentioned, each in its own place and with its own role.

The verses abound in the pictorial richness typical of the *Rg Veda*: the *soma* with its mortar, pestle, and sieve; the containers and the cowhide; the abundance of livestock; the chariot of gold given to Śunahṣepa and Varuṇa's golden mantle, as well as the songs, the stars, the moon, and the sun. The cosmos is real; it shares in the human adventure.

It is also interesting to note the tension between nature and culture, symbolized by the forest/village duo. Contrary to how they may appear at first glance, neither of the two is unequivocal: the village represents culture, but also the danger of death; and while the forest represents nature, it also offers the only hope of life. To Rohita the village means humans, civic duties, and death, whereas the forest represents constant pilgrimage, adventure, the unknown, flight from humans, and escape from death.

In this section I have sought to describe the characters of the myth by trying to render them comprehensible without uprooting them from their context. It remains for us now to penetrate the myth itself.

<sup>145</sup> See the rather different implication of the gift of one hundred thousand cows in the *Ram.*

### *The Mythemes*

To analyze a myth means to reduce it to its basic mythic elements, in the same way as in chemical analysis we seek the simplest elements that make up a substance. With myth the process is difficult since we do not know the appropriate reagents, nor how the myth will react to different reagents. We do not yet have a critical method for mythical research. The process is also delicate, for we risk being unable to reconstruct the myth once it is analyzed. The living elements of a myth are not merely the concepts it may contain, just as a compound is more than the simple juxtaposition of its elements. Any *mythologumenon* is composed of symbols that combine to form mythemes of various complexities. Each mytheme, although complete in itself insofar as it expresses a definite problematic, is also a fragment of the larger background illuminated by the myth.

To better understand the meaning and also the limits of this myth, we shall mention three mythemes that are not found in the myth, in addition to discussing three fundamental mythemes that are present.

#### *The Present Mythemes*

The mythemes we may discover in a *mythologumenon* must always be understood in terms of the myth's context. The three we shall identify here represent what the myth had to say to those of its time and, moreover, what it may still say to us today, since they convey three invariants of human existence.

*The presence of death.* We have said that a mytheme is not a thesis. Consequently, this first mytheme does not speculate on the nature of death, but simply shows how life on earth is a constant confrontation with death on every level: biological (Ajigarta seeks to elude death by starvation), social (Hariscandra desires to continue his life through his son), psychological (Rohita wants to escape death at any cost), and personal (Śunahśepa's life is about to be prematurely taken from him).<sup>146</sup>

Facing death is inherent to the human condition. Death is on all sides; it lies in wait for Man wherever he is, whatever he does. But does this mean that Man must face death, or merely seek to escape from it? Our mytheme does more than simply state the problem; it suggests a certain typology for death. We have already hinted at this. The presence of death is a universal fact in nature as in culture. Is culture generally not a sort of sophistication of natural law, of the law of the jungle? Culture regulates how Man ought to face death, and yet these rules always derive from the law of the strongest. On the whole, culture only suppresses total anarchy and the tyranny of brute force so that the survival of the strongest may be achieved a little less brutally.

This mytheme shows us the different ways in which Man seeks to escape death. Each one in his own way strives to avoid death; the difference lies in the price they are willing to pay. Ajigarta sells his son; Hariscandra is willing to pay with the life of his son; Rohita seeks another's life to save his own. And finally there is Śunahśepa: he also wants to live, but he finds himself cornered with no way out. He can neither retreat nor look for a substitute. *Samsāra*, the cycle of inauthentic lives, ends with him. Life here is victory over death, not merely a reprieve.

We find here, therefore, two types of life: horizontal life, which can only be lived by passing it on, so to speak, to another; and vertical life, which passes over the first and reinserts itself in the temporal. Both types confront death, and both strive to overcome it.

<sup>146</sup> See the Vedic conception of *āyus* (Greek *αἰων*, *εον*). After a life lived fully (*dirghāyus*), death is not a death properly speaking. Real death is premature death (*akālamṛtyu*), in one's youth, by accident, etc.

The first type is dominated by competition, another form of the law of the jungle; the survival of the strongest is secured by eliminating everyone else. This is *samsara*, existence exclusively in time and space.<sup>147</sup>

The second type of life is no longer conditioned by flight or substitution, nor obtained at the expense of others (although it may become a bone of contention, as the revolt of Visvāmitra's elder sons illustrates). It is a type of life that in a way recapitulates the life of all Men, and that of the world. It is not an "other" life beside, or above, or even after, this temporal life. On the contrary, it dwells in the very heart of the temporal and material realms, but without confining itself to spatiotemporal coordinates.

Strictly speaking, these are not two distinct types, but two dimensions of human life in constant tension and exchange. Our mytheme, however, does not lose itself in speculation; it simply narrates the complexity and richness of human life.

*The solidarity of life.* After this, a second mytheme immediately emerges. The death that the characters flee from is simply the danger that is inherent to life. Life is precarious—it can end at any time. Life, however, is not an individual's private property, but a bond between the living, a bond that is stronger than the individuals it binds together.

We live only because we carry and express this supra-individual life. Life takes primacy over any living individual. What matters is the quality of life, not the quantity, because life as such is a qualitative value and consequently unquantifiable, ontologically *in solidum*, "for the whole," interdependent.

It is precisely this solidarity that permits substitution, allows one inauthentic life to be replaced by another. We can only become unworthy bearers of life when we do not live it, that is, when we do not truly bear it ourselves and load it instead onto others. On the other hand, authentic life is neither preserved nor passed on to others, but consumed, lived, and therefore constantly renewed, at the risk of death and new birth.

This solidarity of life manifests itself on different levels. The father's life is continued in the son; the life of the Brahmin Śunahṣepa is well worth that of the *kṣatriya* Rohita. The promised sacrifice of Rohita to Varuṇa is based on substitution, a law that corresponds to reality's deepest nature and must not be understood in quantitative terms. The solidarity of life that allows the substitution of an inauthentic life does not mean that all life is interchangeable, or that the important thing is to preserve the quantity of life on earth, whoever its bearer might be. "I will offer him in sacrifice," Hariscandra said, meaning that in pledging his son's life, he offers his own. When the son flees, the father falls ill (probably dropsy). Life is the bond that unites us, but this bond is placed in our hands. We can hold onto it, release it, or even break it.

In Śunahṣepa this mytheme reaches its apex. He is sold for a large sum but reaps no benefit from the exchange. On the contrary, the transaction nearly costs him his life, and his father is the beneficiary. But Śunahṣepa, the substitute victim accepted by Varuṇa, redeems Rohita, who was not ready to give up his life.<sup>148</sup> And the redemption is genuine, since once Śunahṣepa is saved, Varuṇa does not demand that Rohita be sacrificed. Śunahṣepa

<sup>147</sup> We could perhaps translate it by *exo-sistence*, i.e., no longer *ek-sistence* (the tension existing between fullness and nothingness; the tensional dynamic stretched over nothing and subsisting below infinity), but the outward extension, the "sistence" in two dimensions, viz., in a corporal space and in a time, which imprisons movement itself. "Quid est enim existere, nisi ex aliquo sistere," says Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate* IV.12 (PL 196.937).

<sup>148</sup> In the text already cited of *Ram* I.61.21, Śunahṣepa declares that he, unlike his elder and younger brothers (the two preferred by his parents) is ready to die.

concludes the traditional Vedic sacrifice without any human victim, and Rohita is saved from a premature death.

Here the originality of this mytheme appears most clearly.

The solidarity of life is not a concept that can be applied on a physical, or even just material, level, such as the law of the conservation of energy. Neither is it a question of "an eye for an eye," or *jīva* for *jīva* (soul for soul).

Unlike other heroes and saviors, Śunahśepa does not die biologically; he does not pay, as it were, a physical debt. In fact, no one dies in this myth—which is remarkable. The solidarity of life is of an order higher than and irreducible to quantitative standards. There is something above the realm of causality and necessity. The second mytheme, then, does not merely say that all life is equal, that it cannot be toyed with. Ajigarta is charged with having committed a hideous crime. Rather, the mytheme affirms that this law of solidarity is vital, governed by freedom and not by determinism. Here we are quite far removed from juridical notions of compensation and material substitution. Certainly, Śunahśepa has been legally purchased, but his redemptive action is effective not because he has been sacrificed, or because of any decision on his part. The relation is neither juridical nor material; nor, moreover, does the redemptive value of his act stem from the individual will. The relation is *sui generis*, embracing both mankind and the Gods.<sup>149</sup> Śunahśepa is neither a chosen hero nor a man of superior willpower; he is but an ordinary man grappling with existence and ready to play his last card in the game of human interdependence. Śunahśepa is anyone who finds himself with his back against the wall because this solidarity of life has made him the last link in the chain of human lives. Essentially, he cannot do like others and postpone the true confrontation of human existence with reality by shirking the responsibility onto another and letting the circle of *samsāra* turn again. He must face death by accepting the solidarity of life and preparing for the leap into transcendence.

This mytheme tells us that the true human condition involves such dependence upon others that we can be completely trapped with no other way out but to cross over into a completely new sphere that transcends the spatiotemporal individual. Put simply, the just must pay for the sinners since they are the only ones who can pay. They are called just precisely because they do not hold a misplaced sense of individualistic propriety and so do not find their fate unjust (or else they would no longer be just).

This solidarity of life (which to those living in the myth's day needed no explaining, but which we today must be reminded of) concerns all life, including even the Gods. Man is not a solitary being in the universe; he is not an individual severed from his roots and stripped of his best fruits. Man could perhaps be defined as the nexus, the visible intersection where the domains of reality cross. He is the crossroads of a reality that traverses every being, embracing Gods as well as material things.

Once again, we would do well to recall that this is not a monodimensional myth, a strictly "humanist" tale, but a myth in three dimensions, for the *puruṣa* is not merely what we call "Man," much less the individual, but the total cosmotheandric person that is reflected, to different degrees, in each human being.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>149</sup> *R̄.14*, generally translated as cosmic order, is not a physical or natural law, but the very expression of the factual behavior of all reality, the sheer freedom of the real, or of divine spontaneity if you wish, doubtless something different from divine caprice. See *RV* I.23.5; II.28.4–5; V.62.1; V.63.1 and 7; V.68.3; X.190.1; *AV* IV.1.4; X.7.11; XII.1.11; etc.

<sup>150</sup> See *RV* X.90, the famous *puruṣa-sūkta*.

*The transcendental desire.* Hariścandra desires a son; Rohita desires to preserve his life; Ajigarta desires to live without hunger; Śunahṣepa desires his freedom; Viśvāmitra desires to continue the sacrifice and to place Devarāta (Śunahṣepa) at the head of his descendants. Desire is present throughout. In every case it appears not as a superficial whim or autonomous will, but rather as the manifestation of each being's deepest dynamism. Desire in these cases is neither a whim nor the consequence of a reasoning intellect, but the result of an integral situation. Each one desires that which engages his entire being. It would be perhaps more proper to speak of the ontological tendency of every being. Or we might recall Śunahṣepa's hard words to his father: "He who once does evil will do that evil again!" This is not true of an action born of covetousness, of psychological desire, but only of an action springing from that ontological desire that expresses the very core of our being.<sup>151</sup>

While the first two mythemes in a sense go beyond the individual, reconciling him to that which limits him from below (death) and from above (life), this third mytheme places us at the very heart of the human condition: Man is not described here as intelligence or will, but as this desire *to be*, the desire for being itself. Clearly, this does not concern mere fleeting appetites, but rather a deep-seated desire for existence. I can conquer my appetite for possession or for vengeance by mastering it with a deeper conviction—for example, by telling myself that possession will not enrich me, or vengeance give me peace. I can purify my appetites, sublimate them, but I cannot eliminate the constitutive desire of my being that enables me to overcome them. Every sublimation depends on a deeper desire that assumes and transforms the specific appetites.<sup>152</sup> In this realm of transcendental desire there can be no ontological pretense. The myth transports us to a depth where we cannot be deceived by acts that may be retracted, or by more or less superficial appetites, or by whatever notions we might have of ourselves. Here we cannot pretend; simplicity will not tolerate a two-faced attitude.

It is in the depths of this ontological desire that true human freedom dwells, not merely in the psychological domain of the possibility of choice. What good is it to wear a mask, held in place by will or reason, that makes one act against one's own nature? Either freedom is rooted in our very being, or it is no more than a great superstructure. Freedom emerges when it succeeds in throwing off all exterior constraints. This is why we must be aware, be ourselves, master ourselves, in order to be free.

Human beings, as this mytheme tells us, have a deep-seated desire that is part of their very constitution, and this is always a desire for transcendence. (In a sense this is a tautology, but like any true principle, it is a qualified tautology.) The transcendence of this ontological desire goes far beyond the death of the individual.

It may be more accurate to call this a transcendental desire, a desire that is constitutive of being. And if, like the myth, we concentrate on the human being, we might see in it an expression of desire as a fundamental *existential* characteristic, since it expresses the ontological structure of human existence.

Whatever our philosophical categories may be, this mytheme seems to voice a deep-seated invariant that is found in practically every religious tradition: the desire to open oneself to a more authentic life, a life that shuns worldliness, a life that allows us to go beyond the limits

<sup>151</sup> See *RV* X.129.4 where *kāma*, desire or love, is described as the original force that initiates the dynamism of creation and being. Together with *tapas*, heat or energy, it forms one of the two elements of existence. See *TB* III.11.86; *AB* IV.23.1; V.32.1; *SB* VI.1.1.8; X.5.3.3; XI.5.8.1; etc.

<sup>152</sup> Modern European languages have significantly enough lost the desiderative form of the verb (and in English even the future). Future and desiderative are not extrinsic modes or simple constructions of the human mind that can be expressed with mere auxiliary forms or verbs. They belong to the very structure of our being.

of time and space by which human existence seems to be so bound. This desire is generally associated with the conviction that a sacred act, a sacrifice, is needed in order to realize it. I refer here to what historians of religion are accustomed to call *initiation*, a rite by which one passes from appearance to reality, from illusion to truth, from adolescent life to fullness of life; initiation as the true or second birth.<sup>153</sup>

This sacred story, in fact, contains all the elements of an initiatory rite (which may, incidentally, be its likeliest historical origin). The myth presents several characteristics appropriate to initiation.

As we have pointed out several times, this is primarily a myth centered on Man. It is a story not about the Gods or the cosmos, but about Man's life on earth. Initiation is a quintessentially human experience.

Another main theme of our myth is the overcoming of death and admittance to a higher life. For this to be possible one has to conquer death: be sacrificed and reborn to new life. Śunahsepa has earned a new life. It is symbolized by his new name, his new father, his new role, and above all his second birth on the altar. The mytheme does not theorize on the *dvijātva*, the state of being reborn; it simply states the facts.

Third, this new birth does not come about automatically. It is not a physical but an anthropological birth. A certain action is needed, therefore—the sacred action of a ritual, which the myth unfolds before us.

Fourth, the myth illustrates a ritual that involves the risk of life and death, and where substitution takes place only after a withdrawal to the forest—traits we find in most initiation rites.

But this is clearly not an initiation that was practiced in the period when the myth was created. The myth does not deal with traditional Indic initiation; besides, both the Brahmin and the *kṣatriya* are already initiates, *dvijās*, nor is it a matter of explicating or justifying the social situation of the time. The castes are accepted here; in fact, the caste system is taken for granted. Even *sūdras* are talked about in the most conventional manner.

We are not concerned with a social initiation already crystallized in a ritual structure, but rather, we might say, with a third birth:<sup>154</sup> the true personal birth, which is unlike either biological or sociological birth and takes place on another plane altogether. We would like to emphasize this important shade of meaning. True life is immortal; only what is mortal dies, a husk of life, as it were, like the skin shed by a serpent.<sup>155</sup> This means that the tension here is not so much between death and resurrection as between inauthentic life and real life. Thus the victim need not really be killed, since death is never real. Śunahsepa is not resuscitated;

<sup>153</sup> It was common at the beginning of the twentieth century to consider initiation as a simple *rite de passage*. We use the word in a deeper and broader sense. Unfortunately, the narrow conception of initiation as a phenomenon typifying "primitive" religion has not yet entirely disappeared from modern writing. See *sub hac voce* ERE and, in comparison, the progress of RGG.

<sup>154</sup> See SB XI.2.1.1: "Verily, Man is born thrice, namely in this way:—first he is born from his mother and father; and when he to whom the sacrifice inclines performs offering he is born a second time; and when he dies, and they place him on the fire, and when he thereupon comes into existence again, he is born a third time;—wherefore they say, 'Man is born thrice'" (Eggeling trans.).

<sup>155</sup> See BU IV.4.7. See also, with regard to this, Hegel's words: "Das Individuum ist Sohn seines Volkes, seiner Welt; der Einzelne mag sich ausspreizen, wie er will, er geht nicht über sie hinaus. Denn er gehört dem einen allgemeinen Geiste an, der seine Substanz und Wesen ist; wie sollte er aus diesem herauskommen?" *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1928), 75. "Jumping out of one's skin" is precisely what concerns us here. See incidentally the thrust of this metaphor in most Western languages as the expression of an impossibility.

he is *suscitated* to a new life. This means, moreover, that we must not wait for an "other" life "beyond" this life, but that we can realize it here and now, once we have been liberated like Śunahṣepa on the altar of sacrifice. We awaken to true life.

So this mytheme means that there is a life hidden in Man, a new life that can be awakened through ritual centered on prayer, on the existential cry of Man faced with death. Man is then raised up, awakened, *suscitated* to a new life that *will not be* in another existence, but that *is* in this very life, once we have gone beyond our egocentrism.

### *The Absent Mythemes*

A myth is a living myth if it still traces a horizon in which we can fit our experience of reality. No doubt our myth describes an essential part of the human condition as it is still lived and suffered by mankind today. And yet we find in it certain substantial deficiencies that might lead us to suspect that our sacred story is perhaps too limited to serve as a myth for today. In this case, it might help to highlight several aspects of human life and then integrate them into a new myth that has yet to develop. However, by paying special attention to the mythemes we feel are lacking, we may perhaps find a deeper meaning in their absence.

Such an undertaking, delicate as any *argumentum ex silentio*, seems to be justified by the fact that we are striving to understand this sacred story against a background of contemporary mythic sensitivity. There are three mythemes which are symptomatically missing, but once again we should try to understand them before criticizing or drawing conclusions that apply to modern times.

*Sexuality.* The story tells us of the hundred wives of Hariścandra, and the introductory verses speak of procreation,<sup>156</sup> but the myth as such remains alien to any anthropological notion of sex. Man is presented as complete from a monosexual, or rather a masculine, point of view. Where the woman's role is concerned, and even the man's insofar as he is male, it is an asexual myth. The values of intimacy and love are also lacking, and it is difficult to find in the myth motivations, and likewise perhaps interpretations, that can be traced back to human sexuality.

The importance of this absence is remarkable as much for the myth itself as for our theories on human nature, particularly after Freud and Jung.

But our myth does not completely ignore sex; in fact, it specifically notes the sexual meanings of the names of Ajigarta's three sons. Moreover, the entire myth unfolds because Hariścandra desires a son. On the other hand, the children's names seem to be mentioned only to highlight more clearly the family's painful and degraded situation,<sup>157</sup> and Hariścandra's desire is explicitly interpreted as the great human desire for immortality.<sup>158</sup>

Neither is there any trace of sexual complexes. Uṣas, the dawn, the deity who grants Śunahṣepa's prayer, is indeed a gracious Goddess, but if we were to analyze the dawn to find a symptom of sexual problems we would be introducing constricting foreign elements into the myth.

Moreover, we certainly cannot expect to find the concept of sexual equality, or women taking an active part in social life, in the sociological context of the myth. Nonetheless, India has never despised the function of sex or the indispensable role of the feminine (even though

<sup>156</sup> See *Manu* IX.8, which seems to refer to Narada's introductory verses in *AB* VII.13.

<sup>157</sup> Even if these names have a "phallic connotation" (J. C. Heesterman, op. cit., 159), here they hardly play what could be called a significant role.

<sup>158</sup> I agree with P. Horsch (op. cit., 290) who notes that "trotz der Vorliebe der alten Inder für Namendeutung, die Etymologie von Śunahṣepa nirgend eine Rolle spielt."

sociologically she remains subordinate to the male). Nor has India ignored a metaphysic, even a cosmology, of sex.<sup>159</sup>

Consequently, this absence is more pronounced than it would be in another culture, and one suspects that it is not casual.<sup>160</sup>

So here is a myth that identifies man with the male, but that does not deal with the male as such, but only insofar as he is human. It could, of course, be said that the myth concerns only an incomplete human condition, that it does not profess to provide us with a perfect portrait of human life or society but restricts itself to one aspect.

The absence of sexuality is nevertheless not without significance, especially given a certain modern tendency toward pansexualism. The themes of death, life, and desire are dealt with here without reference to sexuality.

Sexuality is *synchronic complement*; it is desire for the present. Freud was perhaps right to suspect the existence of pathological disorders when this synchrony cannot be realized (e.g., when a son kills his father).

On the contrary, to desire a son is *diachronic supplement*; one desires a child for the future, for the continuation of life when one is no longer around. The child will fill this unhappy absence. Obviously *kāma*, love, is at the root of both synchronic attraction (sexual love) and diachronic desire (paternal and maternal love), as we see in Hariścandra and Ajigarta.

This is the right place to discuss celibacy, which is not founded on the pragmatic argument of having more time, or detachment, or interest in things spiritual. Neither is it based on the ascetic argument of renunciation, purity, the greater unity that should not be dispersed. In short, the logic of celibacy is not directly linked to sexuality, curious as this might sound. The orthodox motivation of the Hindū celibate is based on the socioanthropological argument of the law of *karma*. Only the *śāśvyaśin*—the monk who has already burned away all his *karmas* and has nothing left to continue, to achieve, or to undergo—is celibate. He who has lived his life totally, who has used up the quantity of temporal life he has inherited, who does not desire "horizontal" immortality (and therefore has no need of sons to continue his unfinished life and fulfill his unrealized dreams)—only such a one, a saint who has lived his final life on this spatiotemporal earth, is celibate.<sup>161</sup>

Our myth, however, does not talk about saints. So why this silence where sex is concerned? Can we speak of death, life, and desire without including sexuality? I would like to put forward here a theory that is perhaps subtle from an exegetical point of view, yet plausible given the Indic context, and which may perhaps enrich the Western perspective.

Hariścandra has a hundred wives, and we can suppose that Viśvāmitra's situation is similar since he has a hundred and one sons. We might say that their sexual needs have been abundantly satisfied. Sex, therefore, is not an issue, or at least not an urgent one. Yet sex is not only an elementary genital desire. The Indic context would reply here that a hundred wives are not solely for the pleasure of the body and that to confuse the sexual impulse with ontological desire is simply wrong. The three great human problems that we have expounded with our myth are sexual problems only to those who have not yet placated or sublimated their primary

<sup>159</sup> It is not a question of ignorance or naivete or even innocence. See the myths of Prajāpati (*SB* I.7.4); of Yama and Yami (*RV* X.10); of Purūravas and Urvāsi (*RV* X.95; *SB* XI.5.1); etc.

<sup>160</sup> Could this be another factor favoring an interpretation of the myth as a myth of initiation?

<sup>161</sup> See *BUIV*4.22, where it is said that because sages know the *ātman* to be the true realm of salvation, they do not desire children or wealth, which are only aids to salvation. For the Western and Christian tradition, See Ton H. C. Van Eijk, "Marriage and Virginity, Death and Immortality," in *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, ed. J. Daniélou (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 209–35.

instincts and thus allow them to overrun all other domains. Our theory suggests that sex does not belong to the human order in its most complete expression. Sex is an element, and even a condition, but not the substance of the human being in its fullness. We could make an analogy with hunger. Unless we master hunger, we become like Ajigarta: if we are starving, everything is conditioned by the problem; everything is food. I have no wish to play down the distressing problems of hunger, or ignore the driving force it has in the lives of humans and civilizations, but to assume that everything can or should be reduced to satisfying the fundamental need for food would surely be oversimplifying the question. If we have not sublimated sexuality we are bound to see it everywhere. It is obvious that we neither can nor should ignore the importance of the sexual impulse, but from here to pansexual reductionism is a long way.

There is then in this myth an element that is new even for India, a culture that is still highly exuberant in its conception of sexuality. The exceptional character of our myth emerges once again.

In short, we can only try to understand this concept within the context provided by contemporary experience and so note the cathartic effect it could have for our era. What this negative mythemic actually tells us is that the great problems of human existence and the meaning of human life on earth are not necessarily related to sexuality. Might we go so far as to say that our myth demythicizes the modern sexual myth?

*The political perspective.* In our myth, Man does not at all seem to be concerned with establishing a better or fairer society. Rather, society seems to be an unalterable given, like a fact of nature that we do not worry about changing. We can detect no rebellion. Hariścandra does not question Varuṇa's decree, Rohita does not rebel against his father but simply flees—and he does so somewhat remorsefully. Ajigarta does not appear as a nonconformist, and even Śunahṣepa seems to be unconscious of any injustice. It is true we are dealing with a situation in which the Gods play a part, but divine mandate does not imply immutability, as many other myths demonstrate.<sup>162</sup>

This absence should not be interpreted in the modern terms of a class struggle or a revolutionary *Geist*. We must reject any such *katachronic* interpretation, that is, that which projects the modern-day categories of understanding in order to grasp events that belong to another order of things. Just as the problem of sexuality was not unknown to the India of that time, there could also be a certain social consciousness within the cultural context of our myth. And yet it does not deal with war, political struggles, or economic problems. The social element is absent, and this is surprising. Except for the final reference to Visvāmitra's descendants, there is in fact no reference to a consciousness of Man in the world—Man who, precisely because he is human, is susceptible to change, growth, improvement. The myth seems to imply that the purpose of life is that each individual plays his or her role, but not in changing either society or the people who compose it.

We could say that given the social order of the time, one could only either conform to it or escape from it. Now although this may not be totally accurate,<sup>163</sup> we find no indication of social concern or rebellion against the established social order. Furthermore, in counseling Rohita, Indra himself seems almost disdainful of everything social, and Rohita takes the God's advice to live his life in disregard of every divine and human convention.

Nevertheless, the myth is not antisocial; it does not focus solely on the isolated individual. All society is in a way reflected in it: the kingdom, the castes, the poor, trade, heritage, and so on. And yet there is not a word that gives us an inkling of the historical perspective.

<sup>162</sup> See *SB* II.2.2.8–14.

<sup>163</sup> It is enough to cite the entire *MB* and *BG* in order to note the difference.

Here, as in the case of the mytheme of sexuality, we must try to understand before we criticize.

This myth deals with salvation, the salvation of the man who escapes death, who lives his life and seeks above all to surpass it. Not surprisingly, this salvation is depicted using the sociological terms common to its day, while at the same time remaining utterly indifferent to them. The fact of salvation, the presence of death, the reality of life, the possibility of authentic life, all seem to be autonomous values with respect to the social situation in which Man finds himself immersed.

Along with the modern tendency toward sexual reductionism, we could refer here to the tendency of other contemporary trends toward politicization and socialization. Man is reduced to a *sociological animal* that has no other substance; his salvation is political liberation, his happiness is economic independence, his good fortune is being able to participate in the democratic process.

Yet the myth does not say whether the social order of its day is just or unjust. It tells us only that human salvation is to some extent independent, autonomous (I prefer the term *ontonomous*), and consequently that human fulfillment and initiation into authentic life cannot be reduced to sociopolitical parameters. It is not a question of ignoring the dangers of social escapism, the abuse of established religions, the inertia of history and human exploitation; it is about bearing in mind that human liberation also has a dimension that is more fundamentally constitutive than the social factors involved.<sup>164</sup>

We have here then another absence full of meaning, and another challenge to contemporary Man.

*Eschatology.* The third absent mytheme (and its absence is all the more astonishing in an Indic myth) is twofold: that of the beginning and final destination of Man. In this myth there is no attempt to elucidate the eschatological problem, neither from the temporal nor the metaphysical point of view.<sup>165</sup> It appears as a fragment of film, cut in mid-reel and not fully unwound. It seems to say that whatever Man's origins may be, and regardless of his end, human life unfolds according to a design in which eschatological opinions on the matter are irrelevant.

This silence is extremely intriguing, and once again demonstrates the exceptional and strikingly original nature of this myth. It presents a human situation, and even suggests how to overcome it, without referring to a cosmology of origins or a metaphysic of ultimate things. Doubtless, in any human narrative we can always retrace the cosmogonic and metaphysical presuppositions, yet it is remarkable that our myth does not depend on these presuppositions to say what it has to say.

Death, life, and authentic existence can be faced independently of our particular cosmological and metaphysical persuasions. Here we have a myth about Man that does not philosophize (although philosophy may serve as a prop like any other human construct).

And here also this absence is meaningful, especially today when we tend to express everything in ideological terms. This sacred story seems to have the extraordinary presumption to speak to us about human deliverance without being bound to any formal doctrinal system. This, indeed, is the advantage of myth, but with the addition here that the very language of the story does not rely on established and preconceived philosophical notions.

<sup>164</sup> I cannot help thinking here that someone like Solzhenitsyn, who describes the "glimmering light" at the center of a person even in a prison camp, in the "first circle" of condemned Men, or in a cancer ward, understands very well what this myth says.

<sup>165</sup> See, e.g., the famous cosmogonic hymns: *RV* X.90; 121; 129; 190.

It deals with the Gods and with sacrifice; the whole Vedic context, in fact, is reflected in it. But the sacred story itself can easily be separated from these concrete images on which it rests or through which it expresses itself. The interpretation we have suggested is valid both for an atheist and a theist (and equally valid whether one acknowledges or rejects the notions of creation and a heaven "to come").

We might perhaps add that if one refutes transcendence and invocation, for example, the myth loses all meaning. Far be it from me to be noncritically irenic, or even to claim to have a myth with universal value, free from any presupposition. A mytheme, and especially an absent mytheme, should not be analyzed as we analyze philosophical theses or concepts. Neither do I profess that our mytheme is without any conceptual baggage. I am simply pointing out that the absence of eschatology entitles the myth to claim recognition from many metaphysics and cosmologies; the absence itself suggests this possibility.

### *The Deconditioning of Man*

Up until now, our interpretation has been primarily phenomenological and in line with the history and science of religions. It has disclosed three present and three absent mythemes that have allowed us to propose a hermeneutic of the myth for our modern times. The present mythemes we have seen like colors against the backdrop that our myth itself forms. Accustomed as we are to seeing other hues besides these "primary" colors, we have remarked on their absence and sought to explain it. We have presented the absent mythemes as a flaw and a challenge: a flaw because their absence makes it difficult to consider this as a myth of the contemporary human condition, and a challenge because the myth places Man on a plane that seems to be able to do without the mythemes that modern Man considers so important. We must admit, nevertheless, that a myth that does not speak to Man as Man is not a myth but only a singular, perhaps pedagogical, legend.

In formulating the absent mythemes I have tried to represent a contemporary mentality. This should be kept in mind, and I must apologize for my role as devil's advocate in stressing the absence of certain mythemes. If this absence were total and these themes were fundamental to the human being, our myth would not qualify as a real myth.

The fact is, however, that what is absent in our myth is a modern interpretation of the themes represented in the three supposedly absent mythemes. As for a more contextual interpretation, we could say that the three absent mythemes are not really absent; quite the contrary, they are clearly present in the three mythemes we have revealed. What is sexuality if not an expression of transcendental desire? Is death not the substructure of any eschatology? And again, does the solidarity of life not represent social and political awareness at its deepest level? Modern Man may have a different understanding of sex, politics, and eschatology, and he may be right or wrong. But in any case, these three themes, together with another interpretation (which is perhaps deeper, although undifferentiated) are also present in the story of *Sunahṣepa*.

Let us simply say that a deeper meditation on the myth reveals another fundamental trait that qualifies it as one of the myths of mankind that have not yet lost their validity. In seeking the meaning of the human condition portrayed in this myth, we have tried to fathom the depths of its simplicity. The myth appears to describe the human condition for the purpose of presenting as its quintessential message the deconditioning of Man.

This puts our myth in rather a special light. Man is this being who knows that he is conditioned, by birth, by habit, by circumstance and position—in short, by nature and culture. Precisely because he is aware of this, he must learn to live in the spaces left vacant

by his conditioning. Is education, especially modern education, not centered mainly on the effort to teach the new generation how to navigate within the conditionings we call society, civilization, technology, scientific knowledge, and so on?<sup>166</sup>

The exact meaning of the human condition is without doubt that of being conditioned. Hariścandra is conditioned by his desire and his promise, Rohita is conditioned by his fate (true, Indra tries to decondition him—and the temptation with which he provokes him rescues Rohita, but this deconditioning succeeds only partially). Ajigarta is so conditioned by his famished predicament that he is hardly free to choose. Śunahśepa is the very expression of conditioning carried to the extreme, since this conditioning is not due to limitations of his own making, from which he could extricate himself; no, he is conditioned by external agencies, and in the most brutal manner. He no longer has any freedom of choice or movement and he finds himself in imminent danger of losing his life.

This, then, is the center of the myth: the deconditioning of Man, his liberation, his freedom. Our hermeneutic now takes a new course, a second approach, more philosophical and anthropological than the first, which will allow us to see the core of the myth in the protomytheme of deconditioning. For this purpose it should suffice to read the hundred *res* recited by Śunahśepa,<sup>167</sup> to hear his prayers and to listen to the myth in its entirety. We often leave aside the central aspect of a myth in our haste to decipher the threads of the sacred story, the rubrics, so to speak, thus neglecting the content, the prayers, the *nigris*, as I have called them.<sup>168</sup> The central prayers of the myth are all freedom hymns, variations on the theme of deconditioning the very human condition imposed on us by others, by the Gods, or by ourselves.

From this perspective our myth is complete and simple: Man must be deconditioned from all conditioning. It matters little whether what binds us is life or death. Man is conditioned by fear of death, by attachment to life, and by his desires, which bind rather than release him. This myth reveals the essence of religion as an unbinding rather than a "religatio."<sup>169</sup>

By deconditioning, we mean this *liberation* from all conditioning, which gives each of us the freedom to be, without constraints or limits, all that we are capable of being. This liberation is at once a *freedom from* (our bonds) and a *freedom to* (realize ourselves fully). The example of Śunahśepa is clear. He is freed from death to realize his being (symbolized here by the performing of the Vedic sacrifice and the beginning of a new life as Viśvāmitra's son).

Here again we discover a human invariant that is found under different names in every culture: *mokṣa*, or, literally, liberation according to the entire Indic tradition.<sup>170</sup> *Soteria*, *salus*, freedom, emancipation, independence, deliverance, and so on are different words used to define it in various traditions.

<sup>166</sup> I am tempted to quote here from another tradition and cite Tsze Sze's first thesis (I.1) in the *Chung Yung*, the second of the *Four Classics* of Chinese wisdom, which Ezra Pound rendered as *The Unwobbling Pivot* (and whose version I reproduce): "What heaven has disposed and sealed is called the inborn nature. The realization of this nature is called the process. The clarification of this process (the understanding or making intelligible of this process) is called education." The translation can be found in Pound's *Confucius* (New York: New Directions, 1969).

<sup>167</sup> There are exactly ninety-seven *ris* and thirty-one *gāthās*.

<sup>168</sup> If *rubrics*, printed in *rubrum*, red, explain the ceremonies, what I call *nigris*, generally printed in *nigrum*, black, constitute the very substance of the rites. See R. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 69 sq.

<sup>169</sup> See chapter XVI.

<sup>170</sup> From the root *muc* (*moks-*) meaning liberate, set free.

Man finds himself conditioned, vassalized, annexed, exploited, and abused by the Gods, fate, nature, society, others, and himself. He senses within himself the desire and even the capacity to be free, but he suffers from his lack of freedom; he longs for liberation. This is the protomytheme of our sacred story. It tells us that this desire for liberation is the fundamental human impulse, and adds that this liberation is possible in any circumstance, since *Sūrahśepa* achieves it in the most desperate predicament. It emphasizes that this emancipation belongs to the deepest stratum of the human person, and silently shows that the need for freedom is clearly more basic than sexual desires, political opinions, economic situations, or human ideologies. Our protomythemic also reveals that the price of this true freedom is our own life, which must be redeemed, restored after death is vanquished.

Is not modern Man, Man of the *modus*, Man of the fleeting current moment, more conditioned by the forces of alienation than ever before? Is not civilized life, especially modern-day "developed" life, which is still obsessed with development, synonymous with conditioned life—conditioned by others, by society, by the innumerable webs we spin and which bind us not only to each other but also to the megamachine Man has constructed and without which, or outside of which, he can no longer live? Contemporary Man does not know how to live without his technological diving suit, and very soon he will no longer know how to breathe without it.

Myths do more than offer a horizon in which we may place our thoughts, giving them a backdrop and a context. They also guide our way of thinking and encourage us to follow one approach rather than another; they invite us to think in a certain direction. Likewise, our *mythologumenon* presents modern Man with a twofold invitation: not to allow himself to be crushed by culture and nature, by Men, society, and the Gods, and to envision not an epilogue in a horizontal future that nobody will ever see, but rather a transhistorical present that neither denies the temporal nor is engulfed by it. Our sacred story is unquestionably a challenge to the myth of history. Human freedom is possible and real, not merely for our successors, or in *another* life—but now, in the *tempiterno* present, in the deepest core of the *humanum*.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>171</sup> See R. Panikkar, "El presente tempiterno. Una apostilla a la historia de la salvación y a la teología de la liberación," in *Teología y mundo contemporáneo. Homenaje a K. Rahner*, ed. A. Vargas-Machuca (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1975), 133–75, where these ideas are further developed.

## YAMA

*A Myth of the Primordial Man*

Yama and Yami, twin brother and sister, are the primordial human pair in the *Rg Veda*. Yami, to preserve the human race, tries to tempt, trick, and cajole her brother into an incest forbidden by the Gods. She fails. Yama resists all her enticements. He later becomes, paradoxically, the first human to overcome death, and therefore a hero and a bridge for all mortals who will follow him to find a safe passage to immortality. Yet if the incest did not take place, where have these others come from? The text suggests that here, at the wellspring of humankind, we find a miracle.

The very concept of mythology is either a contradiction in terms or the very negation and destruction of myth. *Mythos* and *logos* belong to the same plane, and though they are closely related, one is not subordinate to the other. Both are organs by which we open up to reality. Mythology, therefore—that is, the approach to the *mythos* through the *logos* or the interpretation of the *mythos* with the *logos*—will kill the real myth and reduce it to a mere story, more or less imaginative. "Mythology" distorts the myth. To anyone who lives or believes in a myth, the "mythological" description of it is no more than a caricature of the true, living myth.

Mythology, however, may also have another meaning. We cannot reduce the *logos* to reason while overlooking the central aspect of the *logos* as word. Mythology is not only the death of the myth; it is also a methodological error. Yet the term *mythology* may also mean *legein*, that is, the telling of the myth, the singing of the story, the conveying of the message, and in this sense mythology would be a perfectly legitimate expression.

The myth of Prajāpati deals not only with creation, with what we may call the "originating fault,"<sup>1</sup> but also with the theme of father-daughter procreation.<sup>2</sup> Here I would like to mention just one (I emphasize this) aspect of the complementary brother-sister procreation in a hymn of the *Rg Veda*.<sup>3</sup>

Let us start by giving a translation of this famous hymn, from the latest, and perhaps the most important, book of the *Rg Veda*. To complete the figure of Yama, I have added a selection from another hymn, followed by our commentary.

<sup>1</sup> See R. Panikkar, "La faute originante ou l'immolation créatrice: le mythe de Prajāpati," in *Le Mythe de la Peine*, ed. E. Castelli (Paris: Aubier, 1967), 67–100.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Panikkar, "The Myth of Incest as Symbol for Redemption in Vedic India," in *Types of Redemption*, ed. R. J. Z. Werblowsky and C. J. Bleeker (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 130–43.

<sup>3</sup> The materials of this article are taken from R. Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977).

## The Twins of the Gods and of Man: Yama-Yami

RV X.10

[Yami:]

1. May I entice my friend toward friendship,  
though he has gone far beyond the oceans!  
The sage shall produce a grandchild for his fathers,  
considering what will happen here on earth.

[Yama:]

2. Your friend repudiates such a friendship,  
as will make of his sister a woman unrelated.  
The heroes, sons of the mighty Asura,  
sustainers of the heaven, view all from afar.\*

[Yami:]

3. Do not the immortals require of you this,  
that from the sole existing mortal issue an offspring?  
Let your heart and mine be fused together.  
Enter now as husband the body of your wife!\*

[Yama:]

4. Shall we do now what has hitherto been spurned?  
Shall we who speak truth now countenance wrong?  
The Spirit and the Nymph within the waters  
these are our origin, our intimate kinship.†

[Yami]:

5. Even in the womb God, the Ordainer  
and Vivifier, molder of forms, made us consorts.  
No one transgresses his holy laws;  
to this both Heaven and Earth bear witness.‡

[Yama:]

6. Who knows about the first day? Who has seen it?  
Who can of that day produce firm proof?  
Great is the decree of Mitra and Varuna,  
What, temptress, will you say to men to seduce them?§

\* Sister: *salaksma*, she who has the same features, is of the same parentage. Sons of the mighty Asura: The Angiras who perform the role of moral overseers in the same way as the divine watchmen in v. 8.

† The sole existing mortal: a frequent designation of Yama. Heart: *manas*.

‡ Truth: *rita*.

§ Wrong: *anrita*, unrighteousness—See RV III.4.7, which may shed some light on more than one aspect: truth-untruth; the connection with Sacrifice, with Manu, etc.

Spirit: Gandharva. Nymph: Apsara, here understood to be the parents of Yama and Yami.

Origin: *nabhi*, lit. navel.

Kinship: *iāmi*, blood-relation, sister.

† Ordainer: *Tvaṣṭṛ*.

Vivifier: Savitṛ. Holy laws: *vratāni*.

‡ Temptress: *āhanas*, lascivious woman.

[Yami:]

7. Desire for Yama overwhelms me, Yami,  
to lie with him on a common bed.  
As a woman to her husband I would yield my body.  
Like chariot-wheels let us move to and fro!"

[Yama:]

8. They do not rest nor close their eyes,  
these watchmen of the gods who pace around us.  
Go, temptress, with another, not with me!  
With him move like chariot-wheels to and fro!<sup>10</sup>

[Yami:]

9. By day and by night would Yamī cherish you.  
For a moment the eye of the Sun would vanish!  
Twins unite in a bond like that of Earth and Heaven.  
The blame for the incest of Yama will be Yamī's.<sup>11</sup>

[Yama:]

10. It may well be that in later generations  
brother and sister will act against the law.  
Look for another than myself, O fair one,  
and offer your arm to another lover.<sup>12</sup>

[Yamī:]

11. What brother is he who protects not his sister?  
Does she count as a sister when destruction is at hand?  
Swept along by love, I whisper again.  
Unite your body with this body of mine!<sup>13</sup>

[Yama:]

12. Never will I unite my body with yours.  
Sin it is called to approach one's sister.  
Not with me—with another find your delight!  
Your brother, O fair one, does not desire it.

[Yamī:]

13. O miserable coward! In you, O Yama,  
I do not find either soul or heart.  
Very well—let another entwine herself round you  
as a girdle, as a creeper encircles a tree!

<sup>9</sup> Bed: *yoni*, lit. womb.

<sup>10</sup> Watchmen of the Gods; *devāñāmī spasa*.

Tempress: *abhanas*.

<sup>11</sup> Incest: *ajāmi*, "what is not proper for brother and sister," lawless act. Without the sun there is night and then the God would not see.

Bond like that of Earth and Heaven; see v. 5, a reference to the myth of Heaven and Earth who are called sisters in *RV* I.159.4—and yet are the parents of the universe.

<sup>12</sup> Act against the law; *ajāmi*. Lover; lit. bull.

<sup>13</sup> Destruction: *nirṛti*.

[Yama:]

14. Entwine yourself also, O Yāmī, round another.  
Let another embrace you like the creeper a tree!  
Seek to win his heart and let him win yours  
and form with him a blessed union!<sup>14</sup>

### The Forerunner

*RV*X.14

[The chronicler]

1. The one who has climbed the mighty steeps,  
thus blazing a trail for many to follow,  
the son of Vivasvat, the gatherer of men,  
Yama, the King, we worship with offerings.<sup>15</sup>

2. Yama was the first to find us a way,  
the pastures that no one shall steal from us.  
The path that our ancient fathers took  
all mortals, once born, must tread for themselves.

[...]

[The last blessings (to the dead)]

7. Proceed, proceed along the ancient pathways  
whereupon our forefathers have passed before us.  
There you shall see the God Varuṇa and Yama,  
the two kings, rejoicing in the offerings.<sup>16</sup>

8. Meet Yama and the Fathers in the highest heaven  
along with your offerings and praiseworthy deeds.  
Rid of imperfection, seek again your dwelling  
and assume a body, bright with glory.<sup>17</sup>

[To the evil spirits]

9. Off with you, spirits! Flee, rampage elsewhere!  
For him the Fathers have prepared this place.  
Yama will grant him a place of relaxation,  
where days and nights rotate and waters flow.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Blessed union: *savividay sub hadnim*.

<sup>15</sup> Steeps: *pravata*, the distant and steep ways leading to the limits of the earth and to the region where Yama now lives. See *AV*XVIII.3.13.

<sup>16</sup> Offerings: *svadhiā*, the offerings to the dead.

Both Yama and Varuṇa are called Kings, but only Varuṇa is said to be a God!

<sup>17</sup> Offerings and praiseworthy deeds: *īṣṭa-pūrta*, the sacred and secular works that earn merit in the world beyond. This is the only place where this term occurs in the *RV*, though it is found later in *MundU*1.2.10.

Seek again your dwelling: i.e., at the time of ancestor-worship.

<sup>18</sup> Where day and nights . . . ; lit., distinguished by waters, days, and nights.

[To the deceased]

10. Speed on your happy pathway, outstripping  
the two brindled dogs, each with four eyes,  
sons of Indra's messenger, and then approach  
the kindly fathers who rejoice in the fellowship of Yama.<sup>19</sup>

[To Yama]

11. Put him, O King, under the protection  
of your two dogs, each with four eyes, the guardians  
and keepers of the way, who gaze upon men.  
Bestow on him happiness and well-being.

[To the priests]

13. For Yama press the *soma* juice,  
To Yama offer the sacrifice.  
Toward Yama it rises, a perfect offering,  
with Agni as herald going before.

14. Present to Yama an offering rich  
in ghee; come forward and take your places.  
May he conduct us to the Gods,  
so that in their midst we may live forever!

15. The offering steeped most richly in honey  
present now to the royal Yama.  
We offer homage to the Seers of old,  
to the pioneers who discovered the way.<sup>20,21</sup>

Among the many figures of the Vedas, only a few have successfully passed through the fine metaphysical filter of the *Upaniṣads* and the even finer sieve of time. Most of them have become mere ruins from the past or have been transformed into other deities or concepts that continue to a degree in the memory of specialists, but much less in the minds of ordinary people or in the events of everyday life. One of the few survivors is the fascinating and intriguing figure of Yama. I shall try to expound this fundamental myth without its many subsequent additions and contradictions,<sup>22</sup> in the hope that in so doing we might understand why Yama has remained so long in the realm of the mythical without being downgraded to the mythological. I do not attempt to give a complete interpretation of the figure of Yama down through the ages. I would like, however, to select some of the most salient features of Yama and present what constitutes the core of the myth of Yama, the primordial historical man who wins immortality, and thus a divine state, by overcoming the double temptation of selfishness and the fear of death. He overcomes this temptation by his faithfulness to truth (*rta*) and his loyalty to the Gods.

<sup>19</sup> Sons of Indra's messenger: *sārameya*; i.e., the two dogs, sons of Sarama, Indra's hound.

<sup>20</sup> Who discovered the way: *pathikṛ*, those who prepared the path.

<sup>21</sup> There is a final stanza, which may have been added at a later date.

<sup>22</sup> These not only add to its charm but also represent the fact that Yama is fundamentally not a God but an embodiment of contradictory human nature.

Though Yama's name appears some fifty times in the *Rg Veda*, only three hymns are dedicated to him. The main reason he has outlived most of the other deities may be precisely because he is not, strictly speaking, a God, but a man. Not just an animal called man, however, but a complete man, a divinized or immortal man, the first man ever to cross over into the realm beyond.<sup>23</sup> Though later periods prefer to describe him as a judge, with Citragupta as his scribe, and emphasize the role of his two dogs as messengers, in the Vedic period he is not a figure who punishes, but a hero who goes before us and shares with us both the human condition and the divine calling.<sup>24</sup> He is the first man to become immortal, the first to fulfill his destiny. He is the Forerunner,<sup>25</sup> or as the *Atharva-veda* describes him, paraphrasing the *rg* of the Vedic hymn,<sup>26</sup> "Yama was the first among the mortals to die, the first to go forth into that world before us."<sup>27</sup> Yama continues to be the personification of the bond between the two worlds. He does not come from the other world to ours, but on the contrary, he goes from our world to the other realm. Yama is the bridge to immortality built on our side. Unlike other bridges, however, Yama is a person; the bridge is personified.

Yama also touches one of the deepest human realities: death. Yama is the king of the dead.<sup>28</sup> Death is his path,<sup>29</sup> and he is identified with death.<sup>30</sup>

As I have said, in the *Rg Veda* he is never explicitly referred to as a God, but only as a king,<sup>31</sup> a king of that human realm that is the kingdom of the dead. Yama is "he who brings together the people."<sup>32</sup> Sooner or later, all people are gathered together by him. He gives them a resting place.<sup>33</sup> He is more of a hero than a God of death. People pray to him to be released from their bondage.<sup>34</sup>

We now come to our specific hymn. The story is clear and well-known. Yami, the twin sister of Yama, not only loves him but is convinced that the law of nature, which she certainly represents, demands that man and woman procreate and love each other. Moreover, as twins, Yama and Yami have already lain together in their mother's womb. Their first responsibility, however, is to future generations: if they do not procreate, mankind will perish forever; the human race will be extinguished. All the arguments are in Yami's favor.

Yama, however, does not yield. He replies that evil times will follow if these unlawful actions are committed, and that he is not prepared to carry out such a deed. Mitra, Varuṇa, and all the Gods would disapprove. He is unmoved by dialectical arguments and unconcerned with pragmatic reasoning; the primordial man remains righteous and true to his vocation.

We have already suggested, however, the main reason for Yama's refusal: his loyalty to *rta*, the cosmic order, and his opposition to *anṛta*, falsehood:

<sup>23</sup> See *RV* X.a.1-2.

<sup>24</sup> The name Yama has a double etymology. Whereas for the first period he can be said to be the "twin" (not only of Yami but of Man and Gods), in the second period his name is interpreted as meaning "the restrainer."

<sup>25</sup> See *RV* X.14.

<sup>26</sup> *RV* X.14.

<sup>27</sup> *AV* XVIII.3.13. Probably the "mortals" do not include the Gods here, though as is known, they were not originally immortals. Yama belongs to man's history.

<sup>28</sup> See *RV* X.16.9.

<sup>29</sup> See *RV* I.38.5.

<sup>30</sup> See *RV* I.164.4.

<sup>31</sup> See *RV* IX.113.8; X.14 throughout.

<sup>32</sup> See *RV* X.14.1.

<sup>33</sup> See *RV* X.14.9; X.18.13.34.

<sup>34</sup> See *RV* X.97.16.

Shall I utter truth aloud  
and murmur untruth secretly?  
Shall I be a hypocrite and only keep up appearances?  
Act according to someone else's whim,  
or even follow my own preferences,  
disregarding the true cosmic order of things?  
Shall I, then, not be truthful?<sup>35</sup>

This faithfulness to the truth seems to be the pivot of the whole story.

Although they are supposed to be alone, Yama, with an extremely refined psychological mechanism, simply directs Yami's imagination toward the embracing of another. Here we have an indication that the gratification of sexual desire is not of primary importance.

Yama is a brother of the Gods. His father, Vivasvat,<sup>36</sup> is certainly a solar deity, perhaps the sun itself. Saranuy, his mother, is none other than the daughter of the God Tvaṣṭṛ. Yet Yama is also a brother of Men.<sup>37</sup> Though he is offered *soma*, and is therefore granted a privilege reserved for the Gods, he is never explicitly referred to as a God himself.<sup>38</sup> He is a real man, and the whole story of his temptation proves that he has had to fight for his own salvation. By nature, that is, by birth, Yama is the twin of both Gods and Men. But by grace—that is, by conquest, merit, deeds, and by his loyalty to his own life—he overcomes death and becomes immortal, divinized, and the father of all Men once they reach the other side of time and space. He is the king of the dead.

Later legends tell of the death of Yama and the inconsolable grief and sorrow of his sister Yami. This gives rise to the beautifully human explanation of the cosmic rhythm of day and night that brings respite from the grief of his devoted sister. The Gods, seeing the sadness of Yami, who is unable to forget the death of Yama, create the night:

Yama was dead. The Gods tried to persuade Yami to forget him. Whenever they implored her to do so, she said, "But it is only today that he died." Then the Gods said, "In this way she will certainly never forget him; we will create night." So the Gods created night and thus there arose a morrow; thereupon she forgot him. Therefore people say, "Without doubt day and night together cause sorrow to be forgotten."<sup>39</sup>

The myth of Yama is frequently referred to as difficult, strange, a mere ballad, a pleasant but incongruous narrative, and so on. If we refrain from searching for what is not to be found, we may perhaps understand its message. In an interpretation of the myth, silence also must be included, and the silence on the subject of incest is total. The fact that mankind was not extinguished and that the first couple did generate descendants does not justify speaking of a secret or subsequent incest, as if only a "fall" could be at the origin of the human race. It would perhaps be more accurate to speak of a miracle, indeed, a double miracle, of generation and of immortality. The two go hand in hand. Procreation is immortality. Yama's loyalty

<sup>35</sup> This is a paraphrase of *RV*X.10.4.

<sup>36</sup> Vivasvat, the brilliant one, the mining forth (from *vi* and the root *vas'*) is the father of the Aśvin as well (*RV*X.17.2), and also of Manu (who is constantly called by the patronymic *vaivasvata*) with whom Yama is identified.

<sup>37</sup> See *RV*X.10.4 where the Gandharvas and the Apsaras are said to be his parent.

<sup>38</sup> See *RV*X.135.1.

<sup>39</sup> MaitS I.12.

concerns both, and thus he became both the first immortal man and the father of Men.<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to note the similarity between Yama and Manu, who is also said to be our father<sup>41</sup> and the first sacrificer, the first to present our offerings to the Gods.<sup>42</sup>

This hymn is more than the recital of a moral or edifying story about our forefathers. It is important to understand Yama's overcoming of the temptation of death, by which he conquered death itself and attained immortality. This is clearly expressed in the third verse of the hymn:

"It is this that the immortals wish from you:  
an offspring from the only mortal."

Yama submits because his refusal would cause death to reign on earth, and he himself would die without offspring, which is the most miserable fate.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See *RV* X.135.1.

<sup>41</sup> See *RV* I.80.6; II.33.13.

<sup>42</sup> See *RV* X.63.7.

<sup>43</sup> See *RV* V.4.10 where it is said that through our children we can become immortal, and the beginning of the myth of Śunahṣepa (*AB* VII.13) which hinges upon Hariscandra's wish for a son in order to reach immortality.

## THE MYTH OF INCEST AS A SYMBOL OF REDEMPTION IN VEDIC INDIA

The background of this essay is threefold. Against this background I shall attempt the following:

- To provide an example of the relationship between myth and fact. In short, every myth is also a fact, but every fact is equally a myth. In other words, historical facts are also spiritual realities, and spiritual realities are also historical facts.
- To help further research into the tremendous problem of the origins of religious consciousness, thus making a contribution to comparative religion;
- To apply in one particular case a type of hermeneutics of the myth that attempts to explain the myth without having to justify it.

The typology of redemption that I consider fruitful for the study of this problem is also threefold. The guiding principle for this typology is the very nature of time in its three dimensions: past, present, and future. I understand redemption as a more specific concept than salvation.

Salvation represents the fulfilling of Man's end, however this end may be conceived (heaven, happiness, God, *nirvāṇa*, nothingness, the future, humankind, Man, and so on). Redemption normally seems to imply a certain regaining of a lost state, yet it could also be defined as that process by which Man acquires his ultimate status by means of the intervention of an extra-individual factor.

Broadly speaking, salvation may be envisioned along the three lines of time:

- As a return to the origins, a regaining of paradise lost, a recovery of the primordial status, and so on. This way is through the theandric action, which is normally called *sacrifice*. Forgiveness is here the principal category, and the *karmamārga* is its model. Restoration, purification, repentance, faith, *poiesis*, and the like play a leading role here: time past.
- As a discovery of the real situation, the ever-present reality, a realization of what has always been there. This way is through mysticism, the dispelling of ignorance, the overcoming of *avidyā*, the true gnosticism. The present is the principle category and *jñānamārga* the proper spirituality. Contemplation, union, and love reign here: time present.
- As a new creation, a new situation, an ontological or metahistorical newness, a construction of something that up until this time was simply neither there nor anywhere else. The future is crucial here, and hope is its principal category. A certain

type of *bhaktimārga* that emphasizes the ever-existing dynamism toward an increasingly higher state could be considered the paradigm of this type. *Anakephalaioisis*, recapitulation, becoming assume here the highest connotations: time future.

My opinion is that the Indian myth we will be studying here does not place emphasis only, or predominantly, on the first type of redemption, that is, the recovery of a past and perfect state, but sheds light also on the third type, which carries man toward the future, toward a constantly new procreation. It concerns not so much returning to God as collaborating with him. And interestingly enough, classical Vedantic philosophy (perhaps as an understandable reaction) later came to emphasize almost exclusively the second type of redemption.

### The Problem

The problem of incest is well known in the field of anthropology<sup>1</sup> and has taken a more prominent place since the rise of structuralism.<sup>2</sup>

Claude Lévi-Strauss goes as far as saying that until the promulgation of the universal law prohibiting incest, culture had not yet arisen, because the passage from nature to culture corresponds to the proclamation of that law.<sup>3</sup> With it a "new order" emerges in the history of mankind,<sup>4</sup> a new order that combines the universality of nature with the regulation of culture.<sup>5</sup> Incest represents this passage and suggests what anthropologists may call *the alliance*.<sup>6</sup>

My aim here is to put together material for the study of the myth of incest in Vedic India from a specific perspective: that of the cosmic incest implied in the relationship between God (father and creator) and the world (daughter and creature).<sup>7</sup> As far as I know,

<sup>1</sup> There is a rich and complex literature of the subject. For a psychological discussion, see E. Neumann, *Ursprungsgeschichte des Bewusstseins* (Zurich: Rascher, 1949).

<sup>2</sup> See Simonis, *Claude Lévi-Strauss ou la "passion de l'inceste"* (Paris: Aubier Montagne, 1908), for a good summary.

<sup>3</sup> "Avant elle (la prohibition de l'incest), la Culture n'est pas encore donnée: avec elle, la Nature cesse d'exister, chez l'homme, comme un règne souverain. La prohibition de l'incest est le processus par lequel la Nature se dépasse elle-même" (C. Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* [Paris: Presses Universitaire Françaises, 1949], 31).

<sup>4</sup> "Elle (La prohibition de l'incest) opère et par elle-même constitue l'avenement *d'un ordre nouveau*" (ibid.).

<sup>5</sup> "Elle (la prohibition de l'incest) n'est ni purement d'origine culturelle, ni purement d'origine naturelle: ... Elle constitue la démarche fondamentale grâce à laquelle, par laquelle, mais surtout en laquelle, s'accomplit le passage de la Nature à la Culture. En un sens, elle appartient à la Nature, car elle est une condition générale de la Culture; et par conséquent il ne faut pas s'étonner de la voir tenir de la Nature son caractère formel, c'est à dire l'Universalité. Mais en un sens aussi, elle est déjà la Culture, agissant et imposant sa Règle au sein de phénomènes qui ne dépendent point, d'abord, d'elle" (ibid., 30).

<sup>6</sup> "Envisage du point de vue le plus général, la prohibition de l'incest exprime le passage du fait naturel de la consanguinité au fait culturel de l'alliance" (ibid., 36).

<sup>7</sup> See some materials already gathered in: L. Levi, *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brāhmaṇas*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1966), 20–21, 64; J. Muit, *Original Sanscrit Texts* (translation), vol. 4, 2nd ed. (1873, London); L. Von Schroeder, *Mysterium und Mimus im Rg Veda* (Leipzig: H. Hessel, 1908), 275–303; A. A. MacDonell, *The Vedic Mythology* (reprint; Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1963), 173; F. Max Muller, *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1859), 529–30; U. C. Pandey, "Prajāpati and His Daughter," *Bharati: Bulletin of the College of Indology* (Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi) 8, no. 1 (1964–65): 95–102.

this material has not yet been integrated with the more general contemporary studies on Man. By offering it for further analysis, I hope to contribute to clarifying a problem that is closely and singularly related to the comprehension of the very meaning of human culture and civilization.

Since there is no possible explanation of a myth without a certain hermeneutics (*mythos legein*, as opposed to *mytho-log* which, as the interference of the *logos* in the *mythos*, would amount to killing the myth), I would like to propose a certain interpretation of this myth against the background of a theology or philosophy of the history of religions. From such a perspective this essay may be regarded as a contribution to comparative religion, though it abstains from any substantial comparative study. After all, the most important issue in comparative religion is not to compare religions, but to study in depth a particular (and therefore personal) religious problem with the aid of more than one religious tradition.

### The Texts

This myth has several versions, some of which are extremely realistic<sup>8</sup>—an important detail because it gives us a key to understanding the more metaphysical passages.<sup>9</sup> It reassures us that the figure of incest plays a fundamental role and is not a mere metaphor used to represent something else. The moral scruples vividly described in many texts and nevertheless overcome also underline the importance given to the myth of incest.<sup>10</sup>

My intention is not to submit this myth to a detailed analysis of its many and variegated forms, but to place it within the general framework of the Indian cosmogony.<sup>11</sup> It is well known, in fact, that the myth of incest does not stand alone in the firmament of myths but is intimately related to the group of myths that regard the origins of the cosmos.

I suggest that we might identify the following seven stages in the Vedic cosmogony: total emptiness, the unconscious one, conscious solitude, desire, creation, separation, and the incest.

<sup>8</sup> See the vivid translation by S. Levi, op. cit., 20: "Prajāpati veulut posseder sa propre fille: je veux m'accoupler avec elle, se dit-il, et il la posseda. Les dieux tinrent cela pour une laute: c'est lui, se dirent-ils, qui traite ainsi sa fille, notre soeur. Les dieux dirent au dieu qui regne sur les bestiaux: En virite, il commet une transgression, Jui qui traite ainsi sa fille, notre soeur: I moitie de S4 semence tomba... Quand le courroux des dieux se diuipa, ils guériront Prajāpati et jui arrachment le dard." *SB* L7.4.1–4. See also *SB* VI.1.2, J, sq. See another passage *apud* Levi *loc cit*, *eb.*: "Par Agni, Prajāpati s'accoupla avec la terre... par Vayu, il s'accoupla avec l'atmosphère... par hṛītya, il s'accoupla avec le ciel "par l'esprit, il s'accoupla avec la parole" (*SB* VI.1.2; 1.4.6. Interesting enough is this *maithuna* (intercourse) with *vāc*, the *logos*.

<sup>9</sup> For the incest between God (Prajāpati, etc.) and his daughter (*Uṣas*, dawn, sky, etc.), see *RV* X.61.1, sq.; *AB* VIII.6.7; *TMB* 1.2.8–10; VIII.2.10; *JaimB* III.2.61, sq.; *TB* II.3.10, sq.; *BU* I.4.3–4. The same story with many colorful details is repeated in the *Purāṇas*. See vgt: *MaP* III.31, sq.; *BhagP* III.12.28, sq.; *VisnPi* 7.6, sq.; *GarP* V.19; *Vāyup* III.168; etc.

<sup>10</sup> See R. Panikkar, "Morale du mythe et mythe de la morale" (Rome: Istituto di Studi Filosofici, 1965), in *Archivio di Filosofia* (1965): 393–413; R. Panikkar, "La faute originante" (Rome: Istituto di Studi Filosofici), in *Archivio di Filosofia* (1967): 65–100; from which I am drawing most of the material for this study.

<sup>11</sup> See, for general references, the two studies by A. M. Esnoul, "La naissance du monde dans l'Inde," and M. Eliade, "Structure et fonctions du mythe cosmogonique," both in *La naissance du monde*, Coll. Sources Orientals (Paris: Seuil, 1959), 329–66 and 469–96, respectively.

### *Total Emptiness*

In the beginning there was nothing whatsoever, not even "nothingness."<sup>12</sup> Neither being nor non-being, neither space, nor a heaven, nor a beyond.<sup>13</sup> Not even death or deathlessness, day or night.<sup>14</sup> Darkness was covered by darkness.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Unconscious One*

The One, wrapped in emptiness, generated itself.<sup>16</sup> The non-being desired to be and so it was.<sup>17</sup> Prajāpati.<sup>18</sup> It said, "That I may be!" And there it was, the Self in the shape of a person.<sup>19</sup> Here we have the indiscriminate oneness of the One without a second.<sup>20</sup> This oneness is still unconscious, since it does not even know that it stands there alone; it does not know its own solitude and absoluteness. We are still in a preconscious state, for consciousness implies a certain self-disclosure that is incompatible with perfect oneness. Later on a certain vedānta will say that Brahman is so pure that it does not even know it is Brahman.

### *Conscious Solitude*

The Self looks around and all it can see, of course, is itself. It is then that it acquires consciousness of itself and says, "I am!"<sup>21</sup> The One begins to be with itself and discovers its own company, thus breaking its total solitude. Solitude therefore turns to isolation. The Self, conscious of this isolation, experiences fear.<sup>22</sup> Anxiety, the most absolute anxiety of being, of being alone, appears. It discovers its Own image and is afraid.<sup>23</sup> It feels no joy in being alone,<sup>24</sup> only boredom and disgust. Innocence is about to be lost.

### *Desire*

It is reflection that overcomes tedium: if there is nothing, there is nothing to be frightened of, the Self thinks.<sup>25</sup> There is no reason, therefore, to be afraid. Reason saves; the irrationality of fear becomes plain. The Self, having discovered itself naked, so to speak,<sup>26</sup> having realized that it was alone, desired a second.<sup>27</sup> This yearning for a second became unbearable. It wanted to be many,<sup>28</sup> it longed for procreation.<sup>29</sup> It simply desired.

<sup>12</sup> See *RV* X.129.1.

<sup>13</sup> See *RV* X.129.1.

<sup>14</sup> See *RV* X.129.2.

<sup>15</sup> See *RV* X.129.3.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> See *TB* II.2.9.1.

<sup>18</sup> See *SB* II.2.4.1; VII.5.2.6; *AB* X.1.5; *MaitB* I.8.4; IV.2.3; etc.

<sup>19</sup> See *BU* I.4.1.

<sup>20</sup> See *CU* VI.2.1.

<sup>21</sup> See *BU* I.4.3.

<sup>22</sup> See *BU* I.4.2.

<sup>23</sup> See *CU* VIII.7.1, sq.

<sup>24</sup> See *BU* I.4.3.

<sup>25</sup> See *BU* I.4.2.

<sup>26</sup> See *Gen* 3:7.

<sup>27</sup> See *TMB* VI.5.1; *BU* I.4.3.

<sup>28</sup> See *CU* VI.2.3.

<sup>29</sup> See *SB* VI.6.1.8; *TS* VII.1.1.4; *TB* II.2.9.5; *AB* X.1.5; etc.

### *Creation*

The next step is that of creation. This creation is considered from many different angles.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the most typical is that of creation as a sacrificial act, the dismemberment of Prajāpati's body, because there is nothing else from which beings could come forth. Prajāpati is at the same time the sacrifice,<sup>31</sup> the sacrificer,<sup>32</sup> the sacrificed (victim),<sup>33</sup> and the one who receives the sacrifice,<sup>34</sup> since there is nothing else besides him. He dismembers himself, offers himself in sacrifice so that creatures may come into being. Consequently, these creatures are nothing but parts, participations, members, pieces of him.<sup>35</sup> As well as through the sacrifice, Prajāpati also creates by means of *tapas*, a word that signifies the peculiar, total, and indiscriminate energy attained through self-concentration, and usually translated as *heat* or *penance*.<sup>36</sup> This inner energy sets off a kind of creative chain reaction;<sup>37</sup> the impersonal, indiscriminate state, the Person, Prajāpati himself, the Gods, the waters, fire, and so on. Ultimately, this creation may be represented as a procreative action performed by Prajāpati or the *Puruṣa* (person) with a feminine principle derived from himself.<sup>38</sup>

### *Separation*

As soon as they are born, the creatures flee from Prajāpati.<sup>39</sup> They are afraid of him.<sup>40</sup> Then disaster strikes, however, and they begin to fight one another.<sup>41</sup> Chaos and self-destruction are impending. They begin to depart from God and go their way, but they go toward their own ruin, becoming increasingly entangled in the cosmic wheel of earthly existence.<sup>42</sup>

### *The Incest*

It is here in the seventh stage that the myth of incest appears. It tells us not only how the cosmos came into being but also whether it arose or returned. The myth of incest in all its many aspects belongs essentially to this stage, which is also the most salient phenomenological feature of redemption. Both incest and redemption may take place and have meaning only afterward, once the world has come into being. The function of both redemption and incest is to explain not how the world came about but how it proceeds from that moment onward. In other words, both the myth of incest and the types of redemption would seem to have (in a very broad sense) a certain eschatological character: both deal primarily not with the origin of the world but with a future situation.

<sup>30</sup> See the 122 *śruti* texts selected in my chapter "La creazione nella metafisica indiana," in *Māyā e Apocalisse* (Rome: Abete, 1966), 71–98, which prove not only the depth but also the wide range of the Vedic speculation regarding the metaphysics of creation.

<sup>31</sup> See *AB* VII.8.2; *XXXIV*.1.1; *TB* II.1.2.1, sq.; *SB* II.2.4.6; etc.

<sup>32</sup> See *TMB* VII.2.1; *SB* XI.1.8.2, sq.; etc.

<sup>33</sup> See *RV* X.90; *SB* XI.1.8.5.

<sup>34</sup> See *SB* X.2.2.1; etc.

<sup>35</sup> *Passim*.

<sup>36</sup> See *RV* X.129.2.3.

<sup>37</sup> See *TB* II.2.9.1 sq.; *SB* XI.1.6.1; *KausB* VI.1; *AB* X.1.5; etc.

<sup>38</sup> See *BR* I.4.3.4.

<sup>39</sup> See *TMB* XXI.2.1.

<sup>40</sup> See *TB* II.2.7.1.

<sup>41</sup> See *TMB* XXIV.11.2.

<sup>42</sup> See *TB* I.1.5.4.

However this may be, the Indian myth of incest appears in this moment in two main forms: the incest of God, the father of creation, with his daughter, often symbolized as *Uṣas* (dawn, sky),<sup>43</sup> and the incest of Yama and Yamī, brother and sister, the primordial couple.<sup>44</sup> In this latter case, the need for the incest is clear enough: it is necessary in order to perpetuate the human race. And yet the consciousness of the taboo of incest is so strong that, in spite of Yamī's arguments, her brother Yama resists the temptation, according to the main texts.<sup>45</sup>

The first version of the myth presents many variations: God bringing forth out of himself his daughter, who is also his wife and with whom he procreates; God rescuing, as it were, his own daughter from being alone and barren; God entering creatures in general in order to save them from death, and so on. Let us simply refer to a few of the most characteristic passages, since we have not the space here to give a detailed description of the myth, and in any case it is already widely known.<sup>46</sup>

Prajāpati produces, generates, separates from himself a feminine counterpart. With her he copulates in order to create other beings. She is ashamed of this act and disguises herself in several forms—as a cow, a mare, and so on—but he in turn transforms himself into a bull, a stallion, and so on.<sup>47</sup> New beings are thus generated.

Over time the scene changes somewhat. Creation cannot remain separated from its Creator for long; left to themselves, the creatures are starving<sup>48</sup> or devouring each other, thus producing chaos. The only way to save them is by a new descent by Prajāpati, who decides to eat them. They are afraid and run away. Prajāpati's banquet, however, is a form of rescue or redemption: he eats them to make it impossible for them to procreate again.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the creatures are not willing to accept this kind of reabsorption; Prajāpati has to lure them with a great light.

Other times, the initial creation of the creatures is depicted as incomplete in itself, and the beings brought into existence are without life. Only a subsequent penetration of them by Prajāpati is able to inject life into them.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>43</sup> See alone for the *RV* I.71.5; I.164.33; III.31.11; V.17.3 (ambiguous; see, however, X.61.7); VI.12.4.

<sup>44</sup> Later on, Manu will be the first man and Yama the first man to die and, thus, the king of the dead in the netherworld.

<sup>45</sup> See *RV* X.10.1 sq.; *AV* XVIII.1.8, sq.

<sup>46</sup> Tempting as it is, I leave also aside a proper consideration of the second type of the myth, i.e., that of Yama and Yamī.

<sup>47</sup> I may quote the following text according to R. E. Hume's translation: "Verily, he had no delight. Therefore one alone has no delight. He desired a second. He was indeed, as large as a woman and a man closely embraced. He caused that self to fall (*par*) into two pieces. Therefrom arose a husband (*parī*) and a wife (*patni*). Therefore this [is true]: "Oneself [*sua*] is like a half fragment, as Yānavalkya used to say. Therefore this space is filled by a wife. He copulated with her. Therefrom human beings, were produced.

And she then bethought herself: "How now does he copulate with me after he has produced me just from himself? Come, let me hide myself!" She became a cow. He became a bull. With her he did, indeed, copulate. Then cattle were born. She became a mare, he a stallion. She became a female ass, he a male ass; with her he copulated, of a truth. Thence were born solid-hoofed animals. She became a she-goat, he a he-goat; she a ewe, he a ram. With her he did verily copulate. Therefrom were born goats and sheep. Thus, indeed, he creates all, whatever pairs there are, even down to the ants.

He knew: "I, indeed, am this creation. Verily, he who has this knowledge comes to be in that creation of his." (*BU* I.4.3.5). See also other texts in S. Levi, op. cit., 20, sq.

<sup>48</sup> See *TMB* VI.7.19; VIII.8.14; *SB* II.5.1.3; etc.

<sup>49</sup> See *TMB* XXI.2.1; *TS* II.4.4.1; etc.

<sup>50</sup> See *GopB* II.3.9.

### Interpretation

As I mentioned in the beginning, I have avoided all psychological and sociological interpretation, limiting myself to some theological considerations of interest for the history of religions and in direct relation to the theme of redemption.

In order to be understood I shall use a specific terminology and follow the pattern offered by modern-day modes of expression. After all, am I not trying to explain a phenomenon that transcends the realm of Hinduism?

I will attempt, therefore, to pursue the following hermeneutic scheme:

1. The movement by which the world has come into being is the sacrifice of God, by which he gave himself to the world, so as to become the world, or to create it, or, as the myth says, to dismember himself in order that other beings may exist. It is this first descent of the divine that constitutes the very existence of the world.

2. By virtue of its own dynamism and essence, the world, which is the result of this peculiar act of God in dismembering himself (originating fall) is pulled further and further away from its origin and becomes more and more chaotic. But the fate of his creatures is of great concern to Prajāpati, who is their very origin. God cannot allow his own creative act to end in such failure. There must be either a returning, in the sense of regaining the divine status (the body of Prajāpati must be reconstructed through a kind of reversal of the primordial and creative sacrifice), or a going forward. Prajāpati must associate his creatures with the divine dynamism by which he continues to create the world anew.

3. There is a dialectical option here, and in fact we find texts leading in both directions:

- The theory of pure sacrifice by which Man reenacts the primordial act and achieves salvation.
- The theory of incest by which the Creator descends a second time to intervene and rescue his creature.

Interestingly, a later theological speculation attempts to bridge the gap between the two theories by introducing the concept of grace,<sup>51</sup> whereby the nature and function of the sacrifice are preserved, but with the addition of the grace of the Lord for performing it. In other words, a sort of second divine descent is required.

4. In the theory of grace, the creature is totally powerless to perform the act. The world can neither return to its origin nor go forward and upward to its final divine stage. It remains incapable of attaining its goal unless the grace of the Lord, the inspiration of the Highest, God himself in one form or another, descends and rescues it.

5. This action cannot be an external action, as if throwing a rope of salvation for the world to take hold of and so be rescued. It must be a real reconstruction of the divine body, a total liberation from the state of bondage, of creatureliness. And the only way to achieve this is through a renewed embrace between the Creator and his creature, their total reunion. God must fecundate his own creature, as it were. Nothing short of what is symbolized by the incest myth will solve the problem. Let us not forget that in Hinduism, as in many other religions, redemption is not simply an external act of moral rescue, but an ontological action, a true regeneration, a new life—indeed, a divine life.

6. The well-known but not always equally well-understood theory of the *avatāras* (descent or incarnation of God) finds here not only its deepest meaning but also a close connection with Vedic spirituality. The descent of the divine does not take place simply to allow God to enter the field of history or perform a function in the *kurukṣetra* of the human

<sup>51</sup> For the study of grace, see *RV* X.125.5; *MundU* III.2.3; *SvetU* III.20; *KathU* I.2.20; (ambivalent text, etc.).

struggle. Its purpose is also to enable the highest of the divine actions in the *dharmakṣetra* of Man himself: the intimate union of God with his creature in order to divinize the latter and humanize the former, to become food to be eaten and assimilated, to fecundate Man so as to convert him into God, to transform him and allow him to acquire his true *ātman*, while at the same time permitting God to become Man and the *brahman* to become the *ātman*. In fact, the creature here is food for God, just as later in the *Upaniṣad* *brahman* would be called food or food would be referred to as *brahman*.

7. I have called this type of redemption *ontic redemption*. What Prajāpati redeems the creature from is not sin or guilt, it is existence or the condition of being created. Here *mokṣa* is liberation from the human condition, from contingency. Nothing but the total descent of divine life can save the creature from its "fallen" or previous state. The only suitable symbol is incest.

8. This redemption is not a return, but rather an assumption on the part of the divine in order to allow the world to continue, to go forward—and, I would venture to say, upward. The creature fecundated by God in turn procreates, thus collaborating with the divine principle and bringing new beings into the world. The story does not have an end, and this again is important. The whole of reality is a theandric adventure, not merely a nontranscendent game that ends by going back to the source and resting there in the womb of the Deity. This womb is not barren, and every time Man procreates he is fulfilling a sacred and divine act. This redemption is ontic because through it a new world emerges, new situations appear. God and the world go on with their game, but it is a real game in which they are constantly engaged, staking their own existence. Time is their common origin.<sup>52</sup>

9. Summing up, we might translate the sense of this myth into a new terminology for our time. The human being is not an individual. This is why isolation is against his nature. So, however, is sheer collectivity. It is not that Man is simply a part of the community, but that the community in part resides, as it were, in him. He is not simply a part of the entire cosmos; it is the entire cosmos that is a part of him.

However this may be, Man seems to be torn between a strong desire to earn back his integration, to become whole, to recover his *androgynous* or *ardhanārīvara* condition, and to project himself toward a future that is not only unknown but also nonexistent. Any pair of opposites may provide a relevant symbol for this situation: up/down, male/female, god/man, past/future, and so on. Our Indian myth speaks of an impossible love, a relationship for which no temporal or material parameter can suffice, a symbol that combines accurately the most opposite human tendencies. It is marked by a tremendous optimism, which breaks through all possible obstacles. It does not simply express a Freudian or Jungian complex of sublimation or reintegration, but depicts the full divinization of Man, that is, the realization of all human possibilities up to infinity, and also the total humanization of God. Our myth does not consider the primordial condition as the ideal to which Man must return, but gives to human stimuli and ideals, especially those of creation and procreation on all imaginable levels, a divine and ultimate endorsement. Moreover, it doesn't confine God to himself in his lofty abode, but involves him in human affairs.

In short, it shows us the possibility that the creature may become not only God but also Man. Man and God join in theandric or *ātman-brāhmaṇa* unity, in which God is no longer

<sup>52</sup> Creation and procreation are interrelated in many languages. For instance, in Hebrew *banah* means to construct (see Gen 2:22) for the creative act, which is also related to *ben*, son. *Qanah* can mean create (Gen 14:19) as well as procreate (Gen 4:1). *Bara*, the well-known biblical expression for to create, is also related to the Aramaic *bar*, son.

exclusively God, and Man is no longer simply Man but a new *puruṣa*, rooted in the earth, in the past, in humanity and yet reaching upward toward heaven, the future, God.

In this process, however, on his own Man is all too often afraid of participation in the divine dynamism, of not respecting the proper distance from Divinity; from the beginning of the myth, in fact, the moral objection is present, and compels even the Gods to punish their Father.

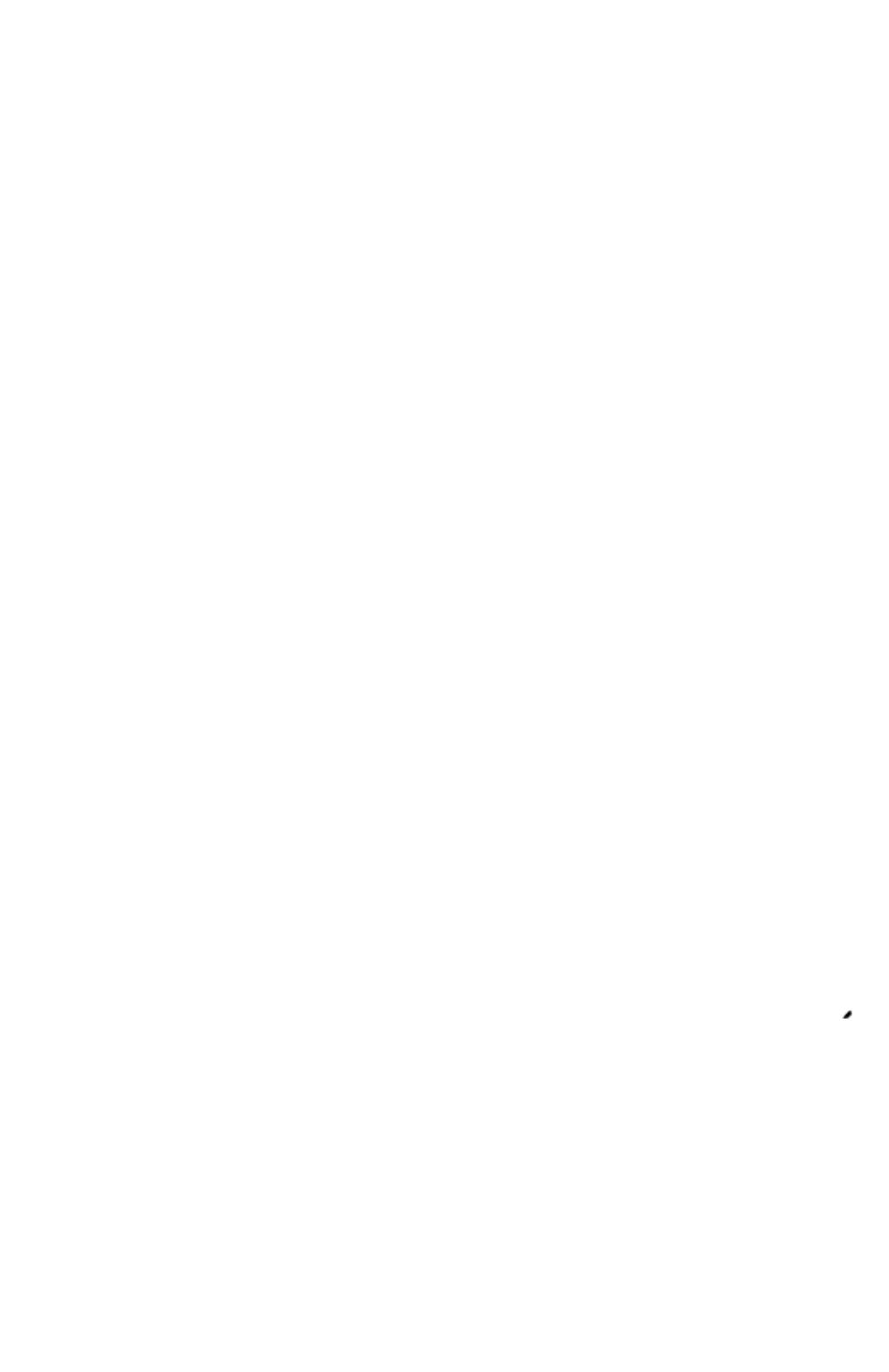
But all this can only be said in a myth. How else could it be expressed and manifested, if all philosophical concepts make sense only within a certain cultural framework, and if every word is not the Word? The moment we conceptualize (as important as it may be to do so), we limit the polyvalent and pluralistic impetus of a myth. Our hermeneutics is valid only if it casts again in the myth from which it has emerged, even just a little.

Incidentally, we might observe that if this be true, it could provide us with a clue to why the taboo of incest is perhaps the most universal of all human laws. It would be blasphemous to imitate the specific action of a God. And this might also be confirmed by the exceptions to the law prohibiting incest, because such apply only when the "king" is at the same time considered to be a God. Only God can commit incest, and only his own appearance on earth can legitimately reenact this action.

I will not elaborate here on a comparison with the Christian conception of the Incarnation or the Christian belief that the Virgin Mary was fecundated by the Holy Spirit and that God became a man in order than Man might become God. It is not my intention to draw a parallel with the image of the marriage between the God of Israel and his chosen people, or to suggest new examples from Egypt or Babylon. I am merely proposing an interpretation of a specific case in the context of a more general theory concerning myths as universal symbols.



**SECTION II**  
**SYMBOL**



## SYMBOL AND SYMBOLIZATION

### Inertia of the Mind

Before speaking about the symbol I would like to expound two important basic ideas. The first is that the power of mental inertia is extremely strong, stronger even than the power of material inertia (although the power of spiritual inertia has never been "calculated"). One of the greatest problems of today is the fact that, due to a certain mental inertia, we have become so used to a series of established mental categories that we accept only that which is more or less on our own wavelength, so to speak, and that represents merely an extrapolation in line with our own way of thinking. We are required to deal with problems but we are not allowed to ask whether they are the right problems, mainly because practically no one would understand the question. As the ancients used to say, we understand only what we love.

I would like here to focus on crystallizing the experiences of different civilizations and cultures and discuss other forms of human experience that have so far (and here is where inertia comes into play) been perceived as accidental and marginal correctives for what today's predominant culture considers as true.

We need a "radical conversion," a "fundamental revolution," a total *metanoia* (since not only the *nous* of *meta-noia* changes but also the direction). Here I should put all the words in quotes, since, for example, I will not be using the term *reflection* as it would be understood by a Platonic mind.<sup>1</sup>

My exposition will first of all take a purely philosophical form, after which I move on to a methodological consideration. We thus prepare the ground for discussing the symbol.

### Thinking and Being

My *philosophical formulation* has every appearance of a general formulation. I might equally have presented this same discussion from a sociological perspective, saying that we are approaching the end of a certain period in the history of humanity and that many thinkers believe we are at the turning point of a change and a catastrophe. My intention, however, is another.

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This article is a new version of the talk given by the author in the seminar organized by *Quaderni di psicoterapia infantile* and held at the San Fortunato Cultural Centre of Assisi, September 20-21, 1980. The subject of the seminar was "Symbol and Symbolization in Philosophical Thought and Psychoanalytical Experience: An Encounter with Raimon Panikkar." Translation by Geraldine Clarkson.

<sup>1</sup> For the subjects covered in this article, see, among the author's other works, *Religione e religioni* (Brescia: Morelliana, 1964); *Los dioses y el Señor* (Buenos Aires: Columba, 1967); *Misterio y revelación* (Madrid: Marova, 1971); *The Vedic Experience* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977); *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); *Culto y secularización* (Madrid: Marova, 1979).

For the past twenty-six centuries we have been influenced by the basic intuition belonging to that part of humanity we call "Western," which lies at the heart of the method that has made the "Western civilization" itself possible. From Parmenides to Heidegger and Sartre up to the present day, it appears that the ultimate, fundamental polarity is still that which was established by Parmenides himself (although he originally intended it from a certain perspective). What is important, however, is not so much how it was interpreted by Parmenides as how the issue was formulated, that is, the consolidation of the polarity *being* and *thinking* (*ón* and *noēin*). Either being is thinking or thinking is not the whole of being. If we consider being and thinking as distinct we find ourselves faced with all the forms of dualism; if we bring them together we will have all the forms of monism (see Plato, the Scholastics, Leibnitz, and so on.).

Thought tells us what being is. When we explore the qualitative nature of thought it is called "philosophy"; when we dwell on the quantitative aspect it is called "science." It is thought that deciphers, reveals, demonstrates, and tells, and that allows us to discover being, reality; it enables us, for example, to carry out mathematical calculations and apply them to bridges to prevent them from falling. It is thought that distinguishes man as a "rational animal"—though this is an inadequate translation of the profound Aristotelian maxim *τὸν ζῷον τὸν λογον ἔχον*, which means, "that animal in which *logos*, language, transits." Man is the *logophone* of *logos*. It is thought, and thought alone—conscious, subconscious, or unconscious (including that which is unmanifested or "inhibited," psychoanalyzed or free)—that makes us men and distinguishes us as such.

This myth (not to say dogma) is what urges us to discover reality through thought—thought initially influenced by the masters of tradition and, subsequently, individual thought that claims to manage on its own. In both cases we find ourselves faced with the same basic pattern: an ultimate and constitutive relationship between the *ón* and the *noēin*, between being and thinking. We are bound to this binomial pair.

*The direction is from thinking to being:* thinking discovers being, it tells us what being is and what reality is. The next step is to capture the movements of being through thought—in other words, to be conscious.

This has always been accepted without question, and there does not seem to be any alternative. The whole act of *reflection* consists in going back to find the starting point, in being conscious, in asking oneself, "What did I say?" Primacy pertains to *re-reflection*. Thinking allows us to understand what has happened: we hunt after things. *Ap-prehend, com-prehend, catch, re-reflect* are all terms that relate to the same thing: that the bird of being cannot escape the net of thought.

### Being and Speech

I would say, however, that there is another aspect of the human experience (which might be the origin of the Indian experience) that is based neither on the tension, nor on the dichotomy, nor on the unity between thought and being, nor yet on the direction from thought to being, but is something different. Such a claim, obviously, has repercussions on all spheres—on life, education, religion, and so forth.

I would like to formulate this alternative in terms of Indian thought (and although I am not an expert in African tradition, I believe it also belongs to the same sphere). Here we are not dealing with the *thought/being* polarity but rather the *being/speech* polarity. It is not about thought discovering what being is (and, consequently, becoming either science or philosophy); it is about allowing being to speak, to be spontaneously diffused, express itself,

lose and empty itself. Once being speaks it can no longer be "captured"; we must listen to and obey (*ab-audire*) it. The classic culture of the *Veda* allows being to speak, to express itself, to lose and empty itself, to spread out in a kind of expansion of the universe.<sup>2</sup>

Let us now move on to the second consideration—that of the methodological type.

### Being, Speech, and Thought

The *method* represents the path by which we reach the goal. The basic method in the *thinking/being* vision consists quite clearly in tracing a path backward, going back to the origins and being conscious of what has been; in a way, it consists in moving (and in this we have a glimpse of the entire evolution of Western thought) toward the object or the subject. In both cases we are talking about an inward movement, a return to the point at which the first trauma was created—a return, if possible, to the mother's breast and early childhood, to see whether something good or bad happened at this time, and so on, and then be able to open up to certain experiences that would enable greater inner integration (and this is the psychoanalytical method that has had the most success). It is the method of *re-reflection* directed to the object or the subject. When, for example, too much focus is placed on the object, all the great currents of thought say the same thing: "we must not forget the subject." From Socrates to Freud, examples of this abound. And yet, if I were to follow this method now, I would be lost. Let us see why.

If we keep to the other perspective (*being/speech*), we might also have a method. What, therefore, would be a method that does not lead us back to the origin, cause us to recede, to *re-reflect*? Can there be such a thing as a nonreflective method? This is the real methodological problem. Naturally, however, once we begin to search in a certain sphere, it is no longer possible to change. It is like the drunkard who, coming home at dawn, is looking for his house keys under a street lamp; a policeman approaches him and asks why he is looking for his keys there, and if that is where he had dropped them, and the drunkard replies, "I don't know, but there's light here!" In a way, his reasoning is sound. But reason is not everything.

We are also looking for the keys we have lost under the lamp of our reflection: "here there is light and here we will look, because it is the only place where we can hope to find them." I am referring, obviously, to the key that can unlock the meaning of life, the key to being. Using another metaphor, I believe that many of those who employ spurious forms of psychological reflection are simply seeking the darkness with the light—and it is obvious that they will never find it. You cannot see the darkness with the light. We could say, therefore, that darkness does not exist. But then, what do we know of darkness? How do we think about it? Why do we speak about it? Perhaps we do not know what it is but only what it is not. And yet, if we speak about it, what does the word mean?

### The Sphere of the Symbol: Pure Relationship

Taking this last question as a starting point I would like to offer a few thoughts on the symbol, because if a symbol (in the sense that I wish to continue giving the word) is anything, it is *that which is not in itself*, which is not *a se*—without aseity. The symbol is not that which *relates*—it is *relationship* itself (preceding the terms of relationship). A symbol is not a sign, and neither is it something merely objective. The symbol does not in itself possess objectivity.

<sup>2</sup> See my short note "Thinking and Being," in the *Festschrift* for E. A. Moutsopoulos, *Du vrai, du beau, du bien* (Paris: Vrin, 1990), 39–42.

A few months ago I had the opportunity to take part in a traditional Hindū celebration in which small images considered as divine are first worshiped and then thrown into the river. These images are a symbol. To make another example, more suited to our latitudes, St. Thomas Aquinas said (and this is accepted doctrine) that if a dog eats the consecrated host, it is obviously not receiving Holy Communion or, in other words, the body of Christ. Likewise, if the host is broken it does not mean that the body of Christ is broken. The Eucharist is a symbol. We should not forget that the *ex opere operato* of the Christian sacraments is such thanks to the *ex opere operantis Christi*. It is not *objectivity* that makes the symbol.

Neither, however, is the symbol pure *subjectivity*: it is not formed from what I experience internally. Consider, for example, the sacred icons that represent the vision of divine glory—we cannot give them an arbitrary form; they are simply what they are because they are not there *solely* as a psychological aid.

Yet nor is pure subjectivity what makes a symbol. I am not master of the symbol; the symbol is not exclusively subjective, it does not depend on my will or my intentions. The Eucharist is not the whim of a few. The symbol is not detached from the faith that is placed in it because it is not objective; yet, at the same time, it is not independent in itself because it is not subjective. Neither is it a combination of subjective and objective—it transcends this dichotomy.<sup>3</sup>

This is a point we need to examine in depth. The relationship, in fact, is not merely one of intersubjectivity or historicized objectivity—a relationship, that is, that history has objectivized in the sense of a type of sociology of knowledge: at a certain time we perceive a given thing as objective and accept it. Ultimately, this is no more than a kind of subjectivity objectivized by history, by virtue of a more or less relative objectivity. The symbol, as pure relationship, as the polarity between subjective and objective, does not allow itself to be understood by *dialectics*.

Here my supposition differs from that of most contemporary Western assumptions (whether Christian, Judaic, agnostic, or Marxist), that is, that the ultimate structure of reality is dialectic. This seems to me to be a very interesting but very reductionistic concept. For now I merely suggest that the ultimate structure of reality has no "reason" to be dialectic, without claiming that reality "is not dialectic," since such a claim would cause me to fall into the same dialectic. Dialectic assumes a *sic et non*, an object and a subject prior to their relationship.

### The Symbolic Difference

Let us here clarify a few terms. Contemporary philosophical literature speaks of certain ultimate differences. Those who have read Heidegger, for example, know what is meant by ontological difference, theological difference, and transcendental difference: these are the ultimate differences between various spheres of reality that appear in our consciousness—the *logical difference* between subject and predicate; the *epistemological difference* between the subject that knows (the thing) and the subject that I know, who is the knowing subject; the *reflective difference* between the object of my knowledge and reflection, of which I am conscious, which reflects on the object, and so on. And here I would introduce another ultimate difference, which we may define as the *symbolic difference* or, perhaps, *symbolic polarity*.

We begin with this last point to then move on to other considerations.

<sup>3</sup> See R. Panikkar, "The Threefold Linguistic Intrasubjectivity," in *Intersoggettività, Socialità, Religione*, ed. M. M. Olivetti, *Archivio di Filosofia* (Rome) 54, no. 1/3 (1986): 593–606.

### The Function of the Symbol

What does the symbol do? The symbol represents what, to me, does not need interpretation. In short, the symbol, as symbol, is not a hermeneutic object. A symbol cannot be interpreted: with what, in fact, could we interpret it? In reality, there is no interpretative distance in the symbol. *For this reason it cannot be hermeneutized.*

Let us make an example. If I say to a child, "The body, my son, is the vital tool through which the soul is manifest, matter which is unified in you and forms your being," the poor child, who previously understood a little of what his body was, now feels utterly lost because what he thought was within his grasp has become problematic and elusive and depends on terms like "soul," "being," "matter," and such. Thus the child loses all contact with his body. In order to understand what I am saying, the child must first enter the conceptual world of a given civilization. What I use to explain the meaning of "symbol" is, clearly, something that precedes the symbol and that I accept without the need for further explanations. If I need it to be explained, I also need something to back up the explanation. Symbols are the ultimate bricks with which the building of reality is constructed. When the symbol needs an explanation it is because it is finished; it has ceased to be a symbol.

Either the symbol is understood or it is not; either we are in it or we are not. If we need an explanation, it means that we are relying on something even more fundamental than the symbol itself. When we begin to seek proof of the existence of God, we transform God into a concept—likely or proven, perhaps, but no longer a living symbol. St. Thomas Aquinas, incidentally, was not trying to prove the existence of God but, rather, the rationality of such belief.

The symbol, therefore, is not an object of hermeneutics; it will not be interpreted. The symbol is such by definition—or, if we prefer a phenomenological description, that through which we seek to interpret the symbol is, to us, a symbol itself; it is that on which, in reality, we rely without the need to seek further or ask "Why?" What I mean to say is that the embracing of the symbol is part of a symbolic consciousness *sui generis*. It cannot be the product of reason; it must be something in the presence of which we fall into ecstasy, something that "is there"—there but also here. For the very fact that I am not aware either of its objectivity or of its subjectivity I do not need any further explanation. When I feel pain I believe it is objective and therefore I go to the doctor, but I also believe it is subjective because it hurts "here," in an exact point.

The symbol does not split reality into what is symbolized and what symbolizes. This intrinsic referentiality is what constitutes the sign. The arrow and the flag, for example, are the signifier ("symbolizer"), so to speak, while war and the nation are the signified ("symbolized"). Let us assume, however, that I identify the signifier with the signified and set fire to the flag in protest against the nation. This action will result in my imprisonment, yet the nation will certainly not be in flames because I have only set fire to a sign. This is not the case of the symbol, since it is not part of an epistemic order.

### The Symbol Is the Symbolized in the Symbolizer

What is the relationship, therefore, between symbolizer and symbolized? The symbolized is not the thing itself (as Kant says) hidden within the appearance of the symbol; it is not something that lies within the symbol. There is no *other* reality that I may reach through the symbolizer. There is, however, a certain polarity between the symbolizer and the symbolized. The symbol is that which maintains this polarity.

Let me offer an example: "My body is the symbol of my being—it is my symbol." In this case, my face, my eyes, my clothes, my gestures, and so on are the symbolizer, and others know me, the symbolized, through this symbol. If, however, we identify the symbolizer with the symbolized and think that I am only what others see, we are wrong, because I have been a child, then an adolescent, and I will be something different in the future, so I cannot be identified with how I am seen now, with what my symbol shows now. If, on the other hand, we think that what we are seeing is a kind of puppet that houses my soul and my true self, we are wrong again, because, in this case, if my head were to be cut off, both the symbolizer and the symbolized would be destroyed. It is not, therefore, that I am in my body in a more or less independent manner and that I can be separated from it. There is no duality—I am no other (*alius*) than my body. I cannot be separated from it; if I discarded it, I would cease to exist. Nevertheless, neither am I only my body—my body is my symbol. Symbolic consciousness is that which, in recognizing me as a symbol, recognizes that *I am my symbol*. This means that I am at the same time less, more, different, and other than the symbolizer contained within the symbolized from which it cannot be separated and with which it cannot be identified.

It is intuitive consciousness (which all children possess) that makes me say, "This is my symbol," without identifying with the symbol itself. The symbolized, however, is reached *in* and *through* the symbol and is not independent or separate or separable from the symbol, though neither is it identical to the same. I am, in fact, "my" symbol, and symbolizer and symbolized are two abstractions of reality, which, in turn, is primarily symbolic. The symbol is that which allows us to explain idolatry: idolatry is when I mistake the *symbolizer* (which may be the Eucharist, for example, or a stone) for the *symbolized*. Thus idolatry leads to dogmatism, fanaticism, and other "isms." The symbol is such only to those who perceive it as a symbol.

### A Few Principles

What, then, does the symbol do, and what is its vehicle? Here I would like to propose a schema: *the instrument of logos is concept; the instrument of myth is symbol; the vehicle of logos is reason; the vehicle of myth is faith; the expression of logos is science (in the broadest sense of gnosis); the expression of myth is ritual*. These, however, are not ideas to be discussed here, as to develop them would bring us far beyond the bounds of this article.

### Epistemic Levels

At this point, however, it should be emphasized that, besides not being a *sign*, the symbol is also not an *example*, a *similitude*, a *metaphor*, or a *parable*. Here we must clarify a series of distinctions in order to avoid confusion.

One precise distinction must be made—in the order of a decreasing univocity or an increasing polysemy—between the *concept* (which tends to be univocal because if we encounter something similar we make a distinction and create another concept in order to avoid misunderstandings), the *example*, the *similitude*, the *metaphor* (which I would distinguish as external metaphor and internal metaphor), the *parable* (which should not be confused with the metaphor), and lastly, the *symbol*. From an anthropological point of view this would be a movement from *logos* to *mythos*. Only the symbol belongs to the ontological order; the others belong to the epistemological order. So as not to stray from our theme, we shall dwell only on the symbol.

### Symbolic Communication

Having said this, how do we speak about the symbol? How do we convey its "being alive"? This represents a real problem, because each language is already conditioned by a particular vision and because all words carry within them a mythical chaos, which is what combines them to form a meaning (in the various shades of the word). We might take the word "perception": perception of the symbol? Not if by perception we mean something that comes from the outside. Experience, perhaps: experience of the symbol? Not if by experience we mean subjectivity. How do we express it? The word that comes to mind is the Italian *vivenza* (*Erlebnis* in German), which is generally translated as "experience lived" (*expérience vécue* in French), but this translation does not render the full meaning because "lived" indicates the past, while *vivenza* means partaking of life, a life that I do not own. And this introduces something very important—overcoming the *principle of ownership*, which is the sacrosanct principle of the whole Judeo-Christian tradition. The entire Decalogue, for example, is nothing but an exegesis of the principle of ownership. There are many gods; no one questions this, not even the Torah, and yet "I am your God"; there are many beautiful women, but "your woman is your woman"; there are many cows everywhere, but "your neighbor's cow is not yours." There are many peoples, but "you shall be my people!" It is one-sided and limited, though it is also ingenious—it creates an order.

*Mine/yours:* this is the most perfect exegesis of the principle of ownership. What counts is mine and yours, the *summum* (the Latins were also acquainted with it!). Let us now close this parenthesis, however, and return to our subject. These thoughts on the terms "perception," "experience," and "*vivenza*" are the result of an attempt to reply to the question "How can one express an *approach* to the symbol?" Yet the word "approach" is perhaps not adequate. Who approaches what? Is it I who approach the symbol or the symbol that approaches me? Might we not both be part of the dynamism of the same symbolic universe?

### The Symbol Is Not the Object of Thought

In Paul Ricoeur there is a phrase that I believe to be both meaningful and ambiguous: *le symbole donne à penser* (the symbol makes you think). If this means that the symbol prompts us to think in the sense of "thinking about something," something which "must be thought through," then I do not agree. When I think about the symbol I am already out of it. Thought corrodes and destroys the symbol by transforming it into the object (we think about). The symbol becomes the *object* of my thought. If, on the other hand, it means that it is the symbol that makes us think, sparks off our thinking activity, then I can, at least to a certain extent, agree. The symbol makes us think, but it is also the very thing that *frees us from thought* and causes it to become, on this level, no longer necessary. There is no doubt that thought is necessary, but the symbol frees us from constant thinking. Ricoeur himself, in fact (perhaps to avoid misunderstandings), also says that the symbol *d'abord donne à parler* (first of all makes you speak).

It may be that the symbol frees thought but, as we said in the beginning, in exactly the opposite way: I do not go to the symbol; it is the symbol that liberates me, inspires me and absorbs me, that frees me from my reflectivity. The symbol becomes real in the same measure in which I allow myself to be carried by it. If the symbol gave us the contents for thought it would lead us to schizophrenia, since by its very nature the symbol is polysemic, and we cannot think different thoughts at the same time without being reduced

to schizophrenia. Every symbol, moreover, has countless meanings. Its polysemic nature prevents it from being interpreted (although the term "polysemic" is too distributive since it indicates a multiplicity of meanings whose common denominator I can "calculate" and then claim that the symbol means, more or less, this same set of meanings). The symbol means nothing. Or, more accurately, the meaning of the symbol derives from our participation in the symbol. If I approach the symbol I destroy it. What I can do is listen to the symbol, let it speak. The symbol frees my thought because it does. In this sense, of course, the symbol *gives rise to thought*, but does not make me think about the thing in itself. We can discuss the concept of symbol or the symbol in general, but we cannot talk about a particular symbol. If the symbol is alive, or rather, if the symbol is alive for us, it may be a certain thing to me and something else to another person, and the richer and more alive it is, the more things it allows us to think.

When the symbol is a true symbol, and not a mere sign or the outer covering of a concept, it means many things; the mistake, however, lies in the direction from which we approach the symbol, because it is not I who must approach the symbol but the symbol that must approach me. If I allow it to approach me, the symbol will unleash my life, my love, and also my thought. Elsewhere I have spoken about the *new innocence*.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps it is easier to understand now why I referred to *myth* as the instrument of the symbol. Myth, as we know, is not the object of thought.

### Symbolic Consciousness

I would like to conclude this first part with another question: What is, or how might we describe, what we have called *symbolic consciousness*?

Here again, we must first think about the meaning of the words. The words *awareness* and *consciousness* are not synonyms of a *self-reflective conscious stance* and *knowledge*. We are not talking about symbolic knowledge but about gaining awareness of the presence that embraces the symbolic reality of which we ourselves are part. I would call it *symbolic experience*.

This *symbolic experience* cannot be transformed into reflective experience without losing its very nature, whereas the "conscious" stance may be reflective without changing its nature; reflective consciousness continues to be conscious, while a reflective symbolic experience ceases to be a symbolic experience. As far back as Aristotle; in fact, a pure conscious stance was defined as *noēsis noēseōs*, or "thought thinking itself" consciousness of consciousness. Symbolic consciousness, however, is not of this type, and once again we lack words to express it, since we do not have the crystallization of a cultural experience that is strong enough to inspire such words. This is the very foundation for the work as well as the creativity of a true intercultural encounter.

Coming back to our *symbolic experience*, we might define it as becoming intellectually aware without having knowledge of oneself. We could, perhaps, borrow the language of mysticism and call it *symbolic spiritual perception* or, simply, *symbolic perception*. Self-aware consciousness and consciousness that has no knowledge of itself both belong to the same order, though to different degrees; my consciousness, at a given time, may be aware of itself, and *reflection* is this *knowledge of consciousness*. Here, however, we are not discussing this type of consciousness, but that which is generally termed as consciousness. There is a subtle distinction to be made. In Italian, for example, the same word, *coscienza*, applies both to moral conscience (the German *Gewissen*) and to self-reflective consciousness (*Bewusstsein*).

<sup>4</sup> See R. Panikkar, *La nova innocència* (Barcelona: Proa, 2009).

The consciousness we are speaking about here is rather an *awakening* of what the Eastern tradition refers to in the saying "Be awake and think of nothing."

Neither, I must point out, is it a question of waiting for grace, because if we are waiting for something it means that we are outside of it. The consciousness I am referring to waits for nothing, thinks about nothing, asks for nothing. It is, we might say, pure consciousness. It is a direct perception, almost a "realization," which we could call *experience*. But it is not thinking. It might be hope but it is not waiting, because it is not concerned with the future.

As I have said, it is an awakening, perhaps in line with what Kant, on the subject of aesthetics, calls "reflection," that is, that noncategorizing participation that nevertheless gives meaning to what we live. It would be something similar to the Kantian transcendental aesthetic, which cannot be reduced to a problem of aesthetics but is, rather, an essential characteristic of conscious life. In this sense, we might take the Kantian example of the starry sky above my head and say that there is no difference between myself and the sky—I am here, and for this very reason, I am excited, I feel a kind of quiet ecstasy because I do not need to leave myself, since the thing is not outside of me. This experience is both *ens-tasis* and *ex-tasis*, internal and external. It is the vision of the symbol, vision that does not allow either subjective or objective knowledge. For this reason, a symbol *without love, without goodwill*, or to put it in more sociological terms, *without participation*, is not a symbol. If when I touch the symbol I do not touch myself, it is not a symbol. Only when we are and are not in it does the symbol exist as such, because there is still something else.

### Symbolic Experience

The experience we are referring to does not involve a return to polysemy, that is, to the "many meanings" on which the richness of the symbol is assumed to be based. In a certain sense, in fact, though the meanings are many, the symbol itself is one, and if we divide the symbol we lose its center and the symbol disappears. If I claim to have monopoly over a symbol, stating that a particular symbol (such as God, the Eucharist, the body, and so on) means what I believe it means, the symbol dies. It ceases to be a symbol; it may be a perfectly valid concept or an explicit philosophical position, but it is no longer a symbol, because if it is truly a symbol I cannot own it. In addition to this, the greater a symbol is, the more likely it is to have not only a multiplicity of objects (or of signs: polysemy) but also of subjects claiming the right to use it. A symbol, therefore, may be alive in certain ages and dead in others. When in the name of God (and also against him) we make war and peace, and do good and evil, God is a symbol. When God is only on the side of the right or the left, of those who do good and not those who do evil, then God ceases to be a symbol for each of them and becomes a concept, perfectly valid in its context but no longer a symbol. "*Gott mit uns*" (God with us) is symbolically contradictory, since in claiming this we are declaring that "God is not with us." When we think about the symbol it vanishes, and as soon as we attempt to understand what the symbol means, it begins to dissolve. Spoken language is wiser. We ask what a symbol *means to say*, as if the symbol can speak and I have the possibility to listen to the word if I am able to access what the word means to say (to me). On this point we may recall the well-known aphorism "When you wonder why you love me, you have already stopped loving me"—the ultimacy of love is replaced by reason, expressed by "Why?" The value of the symbol is this: it helps us to know that we have not completely lost our innocence.

Symbolic experience is also a sign that such experience is *not egocentric* (in the literal and not moral sense of the word). The center of symbolic experience is not myself—its center of gravity is not my psychological ego. Symbolic experience does not say, "I understand / I do

not understand"; this mode of expression applies to thought. Symbolic experience is, rather, consciousness that is aware that "I am in it / I am not in it." The center of gravity of the symbol is not within my interpretation, even though I know my interpretation is unilateral. This produces the important consequence that *we can enter into communication with the symbol without our interpretations having to be equal*. This diversity in the interpretations of the same symbol is not indicative of the symbol's poverty (as if, ultimately, it would be better for all interpretations to agree) but, rather, of its richness.

The symbol, therefore, does not allow a univocal methodology; it allows only a personal relationship, because I (whether as psychoanalyst, spiritual guide, or whatever) will say A to the first interlocutor and B to the second, even though I refer to a problem that seems identical in both cases. And if I am not able to say A, B, C, and so on with regard to the same problem, then I am no more than a machine, a computer. It is this very ambivalence, this polysemy, that makes the richness of the symbol. I cannot say A, B, C, and so on without entering into a symbolic relationship with the other person to the extent that my answers are absolutely unpredictable; if I have the slightest symbolic consciousness I cannot know now what I will say later or what my reaction will be. A personal relationship is established when both interlocutors obey the symbol that unites them.

An example from aesthetics may be fitting here. The longest and most important part of classical concerts in India is usually that which introduces the central part. This introduction is a dialogue between the "vibrations" of the audience and those of the artist and can last much longer than the formal concert. The greatest difficulty consists in establishing this relationship. The center of gravity cannot be in me (teacher, patient, or whatever) or in the thing (a statue, a nation, and so on.). The center of gravity lies in *participation in the same symbolic consciousness*. This symbolic consciousness, however, is not a logical-type consciousness, and therefore it is not necessary for all to be in agreement—it is not necessary to say, "We understand each other." On the contrary, as soon as *conceptual* unanimity begins to occur, the symbol begins to decline. All these statements, I believe, may be translated into praxis, and this is why I say that symbols are the bricks that make up the myth in which we live and whose vehicle is faith.<sup>5</sup> Symbolic experience, for the same reason (i.e., that it is not logical), is not reflective—a thing cannot reflect on itself. We all know by experience the corrosive power of thought. As soon as we begin to think about things (not thoughts), they begin to recede and eventually disappear; they become concepts. If I do not think about God, God can be real; if I do not think about the soul, my wife, my game, and so on, these things function on their own. But if I begin to think about them, what will it lead to? Thought is necessary, but we must keep it within its limits.

### The Role of Reflection

Symbolic experience is not reflectively conscious—this would be a *contradictio in terminis*. As we have said, however, there are various types of consciousness, and we still lack words that are capable of defining the perception to which I refer here. This is another type of opening up to reality, which is basically distinguished by the fact that it has overcome the principle of private ownership, of what is "mine," and so forth.

*My thought* is mine; I may go as far as giving my life for it, and even though someone might convince me of something else and make me change my opinion, it will always be my

<sup>5</sup> See R. Panikkar, "La foi dimension constitutive de l'homme," in *Mythe et foi*, ed. E. Castelli (Paris: Aubier, 1966), 17–63.

thought. On the other hand, *the symbol is not my symbol; symbolic consciousness is not my symbolic consciousness*. I am in symbolic consciousness, I take part in it; in symbolic consciousness the ruling element, so to speak, is not my interpretation of symbolic consciousness—it is that which takes possession of us and holds us.

I am attempting to describe this symbolic consciousness at the expense of the *logos*, of reason. It is not, however, a matter of competition between these two, but rather of opening up not only to the gnoseological or epistemological dimension but also to a dimension of consciousness that belongs to the order of consciousness, though not to epistemic consciousness.

All this would perhaps be easier if, instead of embarking on these detailed analyses, I spoke about the *moon*, not to be poetic but to draw from the moon symbol the experience of what we are saying. To the astronomer, the moon is a more or less opaque celestial body; to dogs, however, it appears to have great importance (the effect of the full moon or eclipses on canines is well known), and it has an undeniable influence on poets, agriculture, and women. In this case we are not talking about the concept of the moon as an astronomical body but rather as a symbol. Having separated the functions of the moon, however, we have lost the richness of the symbol—we have created many concepts of "moon" but at the expense of the moon symbol.

### The Relativity of the Symbol

We might, perhaps, refer to the symbol by the name of "relationship," as long as we bear in mind that *what is important in the relationship is not the poles of the relationship but the relationship itself*—the fact, that is, that the relationship is central and prevails over the "related," that the poles of the relationship are the fruit of the relationship itself. What is essential is that the relationship is adequate as such. Generally, the expression "the relationship between me and you," means, "I am here, you are there, and between us there is a relationship with varying degrees of depth." In our case, however, the opposite applies: the relationship is primary, which establishes us as a "you" and an "I." You and I are in this relationship. The symbol is this: a lived relationship.

Having arrived at this point, we must now tackle a central problem, and I shall attempt to do so not only with great caution but also great humility and a tentative attitude. We have said that between defending the absolute (Kantian, Hegelian, Vedantic) subject of the consciousness and opting for the Leibnizian monads of "my/your/each one's consciousness," there is a happy medium, which is the very thing that makes symbolic consciousness possible.

On one hand, I believe, we may speak of a consciousness that involves me and that I do not own, and on the other hand, of a thinking *self* that may be likened to a flash of consciousness. What causes me to see myself as a *self* and not as a fragment of the whole is the fact that, in this experience, *I feel I am the creator*. If I were merely a fragment of the whole, I would accept my impotence in the face of reality as it is presented to me. On the contrary, in the approach to which I refer, reality is symbolic, and I take part in it both as an actor and a spectator. This means that the interpersonal relationship is much more than a mere "relationship of substances." True relationship, rather, is that which creates this context of freedom from which the relationship originates and that is owned neither by myself nor by the other person. In this sense, symbolic consciousness is consciousness that has no subject: I am not the subject because the other is not the object. Here the subject/object schema is transcended. To a certain logical or dialectic type of thought (we will call it so, even though these terms may take on different meanings) or to rational thought this transcendence appears

meaningless: there must be a subject, a predicate, an object. Only to the type of consciousness to which we refer does such transcendence have meaning.

To put it another way: *thoughts are anterior to the thinker*; or, more precisely: *those who think are part of the thought*. He who thinks occupies an important place because he is part of the thought that flows within him. Our attitude, therefore, should be such as to allow a thought to occur that does not belong to ourselves alone and, consequently, is not our exclusive thought. Let me explain this in more detail. We think thoughts that already exist, *in statu nascendi*, which we ourselves have not created but have contributed to creating. We have to adopt a receptive, feminine (I would not know whether to call it passive) attitude, in order to allow being to express itself and reality to speak *in* and *through* me, and *in* and *through* others (seeing that I am not the only spokesperson).

Inasmuch as we think a thought we are part of the thought itself—which, therefore, is formed as we think it. Not only must I listen to this thought (that basically already exists), not only must I be in harmony with it, but I must also be the creator, the maker and the bearer of my initiative, my point of view, while being aware that my own point of view has value because another exists who, in turn, has his own point of view.

Allowing the truth to come out, to *speak*, has nothing to do with the desire to grasp or "catch" what we have not yet formulated, what is there and needs our intervention for the sake of a more adequate, accurate, and tangible formulation. It is almost the opposite—allowing the "waters to gush forth" almost in a kind of expansion of reality. It is not the thought that approaches being; it is being that speaks and we, in receiving, in listening to this "speaking," think it. The artist knows all this; thinkers, however, have forgotten it. They have forgotten that inspiration is the work of the Spirit and that the Spirit will not be reduced to *logos*. While, therefore, logical thought has its laws (if it did not, it would be total confusion), the attitude to which we refer has no law and, consequently, is pure freedom and radical surprise; at the same time, it is extremely vulnerable because it has no guardian, it offers no guarantee, and there exists no supreme standard that can tell us, "This is what to do." There is no guide!

### Symbolism and Dialectic

It is not a question of simply transcending dialectics in a Hegelian sense. Hegel regards dialectic as the sphere of freedom—I would say, rather, of a conditioned and controlled freedom. I have placed the emphasis on speech, but we must also add thought, thought as pertaining to being—this is thought *of* being, not thinking *about* being. Being does many things: thinking, speaking, and so on. Thinking, however, is always retrospective: we cannot think about a void, we think about something and are prompted by something. In this sense, thinking is not strictly creative; it does not create being. Speaking, on the other hand, is creative because the speech (the word) of being is continuous, expansive, and creates being. On the subject of thinking, I believe the formula that is richest in meaning is that of Husserl who, in tracing the history of the evolution of thought in Western philosophy, says, "Any consciousness is always 'consciousness of.'" What does this mean? It means that there is no such thing as pure consciousness. Even if it is consciousness of consciousness (in an Aristotelian sense) it is still consciousness of *something* (in this case itself). Thus we may say that one of the characteristics of consciousness is being "consciousness of."

I would like now, however, to propose a more "scandalous" formulation: there exists a consciousness which is not "consciousness of," it is not consciousness of anything; it is not even "consciousness of consciousness" or "consciousness of speech." It is consciousness that is

not reflective consciousness.<sup>6</sup> This is what speech is—a pure explosion of being: the outburst of reality from itself, a reality that will not be captured and offers no type of security.

These statements carry enormous consequences with regard to praxis, since they mean that our vision of reality is not just something given because we ourselves are in this same reality. There is no objective reality but everything enters into this relationship along with ourselves. Here it may be useful to point out that, from Descartes up to the present day, "security" and "certainty" have always been synonyms—for something to be certain, it must be sure, secure. This involves major sociological and political implications: Descartes's "certitude" leads to a state of security. An extremely consistent line runs through this. "Certainty" is transformed into "security"; from Descartes to NATO to the securitarian states and so on, the line is continuous.

Coming back to the subject of speech and thought—we may say that, once we have thought, we can no longer act as if we have not thought, we cannot go back. For this reason, this new way of speaking is extremely vulnerable. I realize that we might say, "When the other speaks to us, he brings to our consciousness what he is telling us and, therefore, makes us conscious of it." We cannot identify symbolic consciousness with prelogical thought or the infant consciousness that Piaget speaks of (in which everything is still undifferentiated, everything is global: a consciousness that will later differentiate things through success and failure). It is not a question of returning to primitivism, even though we should reinterpret many aspects of primitive man. We should, in fact, distinguish *primitivism* from *primordial*.

On one hand, we have this constantly evolving consciousness that begins in the postinfant stage and of which Western thought represents an extremely important example; on the other hand, however, there is something else in Man (something more than mere indiscriminate consciousness), which is perfectly compatible with what Hegel called *die Anstrengung des Begriffes* (the strenuous effort of the concept): the expression with which he defined philosophy. For this very reason, compatibility exists, and it is not simply a question of dialectical tension. This is also why the dialectical pattern as the ultimate pattern of reality is not convincing, because it forces us to adopt an *aut-aut* attitude so that our experience may teach us that an *et-*et** also exists. This compatibility is only possible if the mere field of dialectics is transcended (not negated)—which is exactly what symbolic consciousness does.

### Tolerance

In other words, it is not the mythical/symbolic context that makes thought. If we were in an exclusively mythical/symbolic dimension, we would not be tolerant, since human experience teaches us that those who live in a symbolic type of dimension do not show much tolerance toward another kind of approach. Yet if we adopt logical consistency, tolerance is even less. Our real situation is inclined to transcend logic, rather than returning to prelogical thought.

Strictly speaking, none of us are within pure symbolic thought because we have all returned to it at the end of a long journey. This returning to symbolic thought, and not merely the fact of being in it, is what makes tolerance possible. This does not mean, however, that when logic is put aside then all compatibilities appear, because even if green does not contradict blue, green is not blue. And this is the problem of myth—a problem that I have attempted

<sup>6</sup> See the chapter by R. Panikkar, "Réflexions sur la liberté humaine," in the Festschrift for André Marcier, *The Unknown Knower*, ed. M. Suilar (Bern: Lang, 1988), 133–59.

to tackle from a certain distance. I do not believe there exists a mythical stage and a logical stage—we all have a myth. Between *mythos* and *logos* there is a special symbiosis.<sup>7</sup>

In reality, in a mythical world there may be as much intolerance as in a logical world. Thus, for example,  $2 + 2 = 4$  does not present any margin of tolerance, while statements such as "we must sacrifice this goat in order to put an end to the epidemic" have a much vaster scope of tolerance.

### Reality Is Symbolic

We said earlier that "reality is symbolic" and that it is so because we also, as conscious beings, are in it. Yet we are not in it as "reified reality" but rather as *res* in the etymological sense (*res* meaning not only "thing" but also "word"). Reality is not only objective; in this sense, reality is symbolic. As an intelligent being, I am real because I understand. What allows a context of tolerance is the fact that I am my own symbol and that, at the same time, I do not identify with it. This relationship, this polarity, is constitutive. For this reason we cannot manipulate the symbol, and if we try to do so we will burn our hands. This is why I have written elsewhere that true speaking is singing.

Speaking of reality is a singing, a being in harmony. Harmony is essential; health, including the health of the body, is "being in harmony" with ourselves, with the environment around us, with the cosmos, and also with the divine. This is why it is a "singing." This being "in tune," however, cannot be reflectively conscious or voluntary. If we want to dance we must allow the music to take us over and reach as far as our feet and then, without thinking, our feet will dance and we with them. Does this mean returning to primitivism, to pure spontaneity? Not in my opinion. It means overcoming the reductionism of both purely rational (and reflective) consciousness and of a separatist anthropology, almost as if man were such independently of a constitutive relationship with the world and with God. Since Aristotle, moreover, the Western world has talked about microcosms and the fact that everything is enclosed in the microcosm; the Latins spoke of the mirroring nature of the human being (*the speculum of all reality*).

It has been said that, just as the dinosaurs grew to be excessively large, so we also have allowed thought to become overdeveloped. Undoubtedly, there exists a sort of cancer of thought, and yet its development continues to be something extremely important and necessary. The alcoholic knows very well that he should not drink, that drinking is harmful to him; his thought is perfect (at least before he begins to drink). To state that "thought is clear, but the will is weak and unstable" would be moralistic and superficial. In saying this, however, I do not claim to despise thought; I am simply attempting to discover its limits within the existential order. It is not, however, a question of going backward or halting growth (even though we may agree that the development of thought is as excessive as that of dinosaurs), but of being aware of the principles that we already have. It involves a vision-metaphor, a "being in reality" based on a form of consciousness that does not do violence to reality itself.

### Temporality

Coming back to symbolic consciousness, we should add that it is participative, an open pattern and a "construction of forms," as well as a temporal consciousness, a consciousness of temporality, which is something more than passing from past to present to future. I do

<sup>7</sup> See section I, part 1, chapter 4 above.

not, however, intend to develop this further here. What I want to say is that there is no symbolic consciousness without temporal-space consciousness. Symbolic consciousness is both diachronic and synchronic, and it is a consciousness of time that is not reduced to "today, tomorrow, the day after."

We must also point out that thought and speech cannot be separated. It is not a matter of excluding one and privileging the other because, in actual fact, thinking and speaking "coexist" in the person and in the relationship. In other words, when being projects itself toward the future and creates, it speaks; when being turns to the past and reflects, it thinks. Hence, speaking and thinking, together, are this manifestation of both synchronic and diachronic being.

### Transparency

We have said that there is no possible interpretation of the symbol because it is the symbol itself that interprets. We should also add a few considerations on interpretation. Clearly, interpretation does not conclude anything. This brings me back to the first part of my analysis of symbolic consciousness. We may refer here to a medieval Western concept, that of the *vestigium*, which Levinas adopted with the meaning of *trace*. Man discovers traces, which allow him to proceed. Interpretation is the detectivelike interpretation of traces. These traces, however, do not lead to reality; they do not clearly show what they are indicating. They are vestiges of something else that cannot be seen. A vestige may be the footprint of an animal, but it may also be the symbol of something that is known only from the track it has left in "passing quickly." The symbol is symbol of mystery; consequently, no interpretation fulfills reality. To be more precise, we could say that if symbolic consciousness exists it must be something more than the image. What can it be? Let me use another metaphor—*transparency*. Transparency means not seeing something because we are inside it. The symbol is transparent; we are inside the symbol and, therefore, cannot see it. It is like myth.

The symbol, however, is also opaque, though this opacity is secondary. Transparency is the new *innocence*; it might also be what guides us in a given moment—the map of the land is very important, but a friend who takes you by the hand and leads you through it is more helpful to you than any amount of theoretical knowledge. What is this transparency? This is the problem of symbolic consciousness in which there is neither interior nor exterior. *Transparency interprets us.*

### A-Duality

Let us come back to the example of the body. It has been said that the "primitive" mentality is monistic because in it everything is symbolic, everything is the body, everything is God, nature, life, and so on. The "modern" mentality appears to be somewhat dualistic—we have the body and the soul, appearance and reality, what is said and what is meant, the sign and what the sign signifies, and so on. The symbol, however, is not a sign. The symbolic difference does not identify the symbolized with the symbolizer (e.g., my body and myself), but neither does it differentiate them. It establishes a difference *sui generis*. This difference cannot be thought about without entering into contradiction. We might attempt the following hypothesis: there exists an opening that we call *symbol*, which is neither monistic nor dualistic. In other words, I cannot be either outside or inside the symbol, otherwise I would not be able to recognize the symbolic difference.

This new experience of reality that I venture to present here is not, technically, a new theory within a certain conception of what we call the Western world; it is, rather, a new path. In this vision there exists neither *internal/external* nor *mine/yours*, neither *true/false* nor *subject/object*, and so on. Within the concept of symbolic consciousness, such pairs of opposites do not exist. So, then, what is there? There is *yin/yang* and *more/less* (though not in quantitative terms); there is a *polarity* (I am thinking of an ellipse, not a circle); there is *relationship* or radical *relativity* (the formula I used to translate the fundamental intuition of the Buddhist culture). This "relativity" has nothing to do with "relativism," which is the epistemological attitude according to which "one thing is the same as another"—an attitude that is very close to a certain form of skepticism or agnosticism. "Radical relativity" means, on the other hand, that we may have an opinion on all things, but this opinion remains within the radical relativity that does not allow for absolutism. This means that nothing exists *in itself*; that nothing is isolated. Symbolic consciousness causes us to penetrate this very experience of non-isolation. This is why there is a "more" and a "less," a "yin" and a "yang"; why there is relationship and polarity (though by *polarity* I do not mean that there are poles). For this very reason, when I speak of "dialogical dialogue" I am referring to something different from "dialectical dialogue"; it is not a question of a clarification of two different points of view and the supremacy of that which uses the most effective dialectics. In "dialogical dialogue" there is a penetration (and I refer to the etymology of the word: *dia-ton-logon*) of *logos*; it is not a *duologue*, but something more primordial, something that is an origin. In speech, the paradox is that there is no such thing as individual speech: Who spoke first? As the sacred writings of both the East and the West say, however, "In the beginning was the Word," which means that God is not alone. Absolute monotheism does not exist; there is a trinity, or as I prefer to say, a cosmotheandric reality.

### Mythical Consciousness

Before I conclude I would like to clarify a few points. We could, perhaps, speak of *mythical consciousness* rather than *symbolic consciousness*. I said earlier that symbols are the bricks with which myths are built. Let me add here that there cannot be such a thing as a phenomenology of myth. This statement should be elaborated on, but here I will just say that myth does not have a *noéma* (using the term of Husserl, accepted by phenomenologists), but it has a *pisteuma* (a neologism created from *pistis*, "faith"). If the *noéma* is what is manifest to rational consciousness, the *pisteuma* is what is manifest to mythical consciousness. Detecting the *pisteuma* requires a very different operation than that needed for grasping the *noéma*. A phenomenology of myth cannot exist because the phenomenon (*noéma*) that is manifest to the mythical consciousness is, in fact, not a *noéma* but a *pisteuma*. The *pisteuma* implies the fact that we have reached what the believer believes, discovering what it means. Let us make an example: to say that "Durgā is the goddess of the universe, but I do not believe it and it seems foolish to me" is epistemologically false because I cannot state that "Durgā is the goddess of the universe" without knowing what this means to those who believe. I do not know the *pisteuma*.

All we have said leads to the statement that the true essence of myth is its transparency—that is why I can discover the myth of others and vice versa. Thus, for example, when I speak, all those who hear me may notice my accent, even though they themselves also have one. I do not notice my own accent and they do not notice theirs. Likewise, my incapacity to grasp my own myth means that I need others if I am to have a better understanding of reality. This is just the opposite of solipsism. It means that only through dialogue can we

reach what is presented to us as real; it means that no man is a center of intelligibility capable of grasping the entire spectrum of human experience. It also means that *myth* is what one believes without knowing he believes in it. For this very reason, I repeat, I am able to see the myth of others but not my own; I can, for example, say, "Today the Western world's myth is history, and when a certain thing is historical it is real." The vehicle of myth, however, is faith (faith in a philosophical sense). This means that myth is not the object of logical thought, and neither, therefore, can it be turned into something objective. Like the symbol, it is neither objective nor subjective. Myth does not tolerate spectators: it demands actors, it demands action. Its field is ritual.

Having said this, I would not dare apply to myth the term "unspeakable." Apart from the fact that the unspeakable can be spoken of as unspeakable and that the unthinkable can be thought of as unthinkable, another category must also be introduced: that of the *unspoken* and the *unthought*, which, by their very nature, are not unspeakable and unthinkable, but simply *not thought*. This is the sphere of myth. As soon as I stop believing in the myth, it ceases to be myth and is transformed into a fairy tale, a legend, or a cosmovision. We find ourselves continually passing from *logos* to myth and from myth to *logos*. In certain historical moments, like the present time, the dominant myth collapses. Reason was the myth of the so-called Enlightenment and is the myth of "modernity." For this reason we speak of postmodernity.

Myth has a peculiar transparency—it is like light. Light is invisible. Between the sun and the moon there is darkness, not light. Light is visible only when it rests on the opacity of a body, which is transformed from opaque to luminous. Transparency, however, is not rooted in opacity; transparency is the very nature of light. Light allows us to see for the very reason that it cannot be seen. If we could see the light it would no longer be light. This is a fundamental human experience that requires yoga, training, an ecstatic attitude. For this reason myth is only found in participation (only if we "partake," if we are in it).

Regarding this, I am always amazed that, in a theological context, a certain Judeo-Christian text is read in almost the opposite sense of what it says and is interpreted in terms of "Roman law." I refer to the precept: *love your neighbor as yourself*. Interpretation: "love your neighbor as another self who has the same rights as yourself." The interpretation does not read, "as yourself" but "as another yourself." This means that my neighbor is not myself. It is the same as saying, "Love your neighbor as another yourself who is worth as much as you." This allows for a great juridical order but leaves no room for mysticism. All it does is emphasize alterity, difference. The problem is not exclusively theological. . . .

It is not a question of increasing our capacity for rational intelligibility, but rather of finding another way to access reality than that to which we are accustomed. Symbolic consciousness opens us up to reality without excluding us from it.

## LOGOMYTHY AND WESTERN THOUGHT<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Today we are feeling an increasing need to pull *logos* down from the throne on which the predominant part of Western culture has placed it for a good twenty-five centuries. *Logos* has often been the object of idolatry—from the idolizing of the word to the logical monotheism of a form of Christology reduced simply to “Jesusology.”

Christianity itself appears to have forgotten the Trinity, and has fallen into that which in the first centuries was declared as heresy, by which we are still unconsciously fascinated today. Theologians call it “subordinationism,” that is, the subordination of the “spirit” to *logos*.

### *The Inadequacy of Logos*

I would like to get across the inadequacy not only of words that are not well said, but also of words *as such*, beginning from a tribute to that person in whose name we are gathered together.

It has been said that Rosmini “made the boldest and most complex attempt at a great new synthesis of Catholic thought.” I do not know, but the authority of so many voices suggests that this is true. Certainly, there has not been any other synthesis, and this attempt by Rosmini deserves to be taken seriously. We cannot help but appreciate his courage if we imagine ourselves living in those years, in which he declared, “The theological school began by meditating on God; I began simply by meditating on Man.”

### *“Nova et vetera”*

Today man is no longer the rational animal of the Enlightenment (albeit corrected by Kant et al.), but the human being who feels the weight of all humanity and not only of his own rationality, and who, therefore, can no longer be confined within the image of Western man. If I were to give a title to this discussion, then, I would choose the simple, classic phrase: “*nova et vetera*.” Hence the theme, “*Logomyth* and Western Thought.” What does the word *logomyth* mean?

We are all proud of what we call “mythology.” It gives us a certain sense of superiority over “mythical” cultures. It is not merely a play of words between “logomyth” and “mythology,” but a sign of the destiny of our times.

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In AA. VV., *Rosmini e l'illuminismo. Proceedings of the 21st “Cattedra Rosmini” Programme, International Centre of Rosminian Studies, Stresa 1987.*

### *Mythology*

I remember years ago, in Rome, when for the first time I dared to say that mythology represented precisely an attitude that is unconscious but still retaining a Western colonial flavor. One of those taking part in those famous meetings chaired by Castelli, a great scholar of the Hellenic world, reacted by insisting that my statement was totally wrong. Károly Kerényi explained that mythology did not mean that which I was almost illustrating as a caricature by defining it as a research, through *logos*, on the meaning of *mythos*. Can *logos* understand what *mythos* is? Who can guarantee that *logos* is the ultimate, unappealable judge of all reality? The natural answer is *logos* itself—but is *logos* beyond suspicion? Why should *mythos* be subjected to the test of *logos*, as if *logos* were the ultimate point of reference?

Kerényi argued that "mythology" did not mean what I suggested but, rather, *mythos legein*, the very "speaking" of myth—not talking about or rationalizing myth, but letting myth itself speak, listening to myth.

I accepted this clarification, and promised that from then on I would not speak profanely against mythology tout court, but I would specify all these distinctions. There is mythology, but there is also *mythos legein*, the discovering, the revealing of the myth, as well as the listening to and the narrating of the myth. *Mythos* and *logos* share the common root of "telling." Neither can be subordinated to the other.

### *Mythical Awareness*

Now I would like to take a step forward, beyond *mythos legein* and *logos* to myth itself. Using more philosophical terms, we might approach the problem by asking:

Is there such a thing as mythical awareness?

If our answer were negative the subject would end here, but we would have to provide grounds for our negation. To negate mythical awareness would be to eliminate 80 percent of the experience that humanity has gained in the course of its history. We cannot deny that, at least up until now, we have not succeeded in confining human experience, and understanding it, within the terms of *logos*. All Hegels have failed.

If our answer is positive, however, we are faced with another great problem. If we are to avoid falling into contradiction by giving way to sentimentalism, irrationalism, and the negation of *logos*, the price we have to pay is indeed high: we must overcome our obsessions and our fears and our need for security (whether we call it criteria or whatever else); we become vulnerable and poor in spirit.

If our answer is positive, this "mythical" awareness cannot be conscious of itself. Husserl, attempting to express the quintessence of the entire tradition of this part of the world, wrote, "Bewusstsein ist immer Bewusstsein von" (Consciousness is always consciousness of) something. A large part of other traditions, including the Vedantic tradition, would say that consciousness has no need to be conscious of anything whatsoever. Pure consciousness is no longer an Aristotelian *noēsis noēsōs*, a Hegelian total reflection or an "omniscient" God, because all reality is transparent to Him; yet pure consciousness is so pure that it is not even conscious of being conscious and, therefore, is not conscious, because if it were conscious it would no longer be pure—it would be conscious of something, even if only of itself.

I am cutting a long story short here; otherwise I would have to follow other more ontological lines of thought. For example, the Vedānta says that Brahman does not even know it is Brahman. Īśvara knows it is Brahman. Īśvara is the possible total consciousness of the Ultimate Reality, but the Ultimate Reality, being pure consciousness, is not

conscious. The consciousness of Brahman is *Īśvara*, and as such, this consciousness is omniscient, total, and infinite.

Let me put this more simply: Why is it that we are told, in a Christian context, for example, that the works that truly count for salvation are those that are performed in ignorance of their salvific value? "Lord, when did we see you in prison, or naked, or poor, or suffering?" Neither those on the left nor those on the right knew they had encountered Christ, because if they had known he was Christ they would all have ministered unto him. What counts is having given. And if our left hand knows what our right hand is doing, this also does not count. Yet how can my left hand not know, not be conscious of what my right hand is doing if I am exclusively a rational animal, and the works that count are truly human deeds and not automatic or unconscious?

Let me give another example to avoid difficulties of a more metaphysical nature. In his male reasoning, St. Luke emphasizes at least three times that Mary understood nothing of Jesus's behavior, neither at Jerusalem when her son was twelve years old, nor at Cana, nor yet at the foot of the cross. She "kept all these things in her heart," but she did not understand. Therefore, even in the deepest sense of the word, understanding is not everything—there is also the existential attitude of keeping things in the heart. Jesus was "in the heart of the earth," Matthew also tells us.

### *The Epiphany of Mythos*

I would like here to complement *mythos legein* with *mythos phainein*. To mythology (even in the legitimate, positive, necessary sense) I would add *mythophany*, the manifestation of myth.

To be aware of this reality of myth, however, we cannot reduce it to *logos* without destroying it.

To avoid venturing too far along different paths and into a different tradition I would just like to cite a couple of statements from an undisputed source—the teacher of Alexander the Great, Aristotle.

Incidentally, by intercultural studies I do not mean the enthusiastic study of the exotics of Africa, India, Micronesia, and so forth, which convey such beauty and depth and are so thought-provoking and interesting that we feel a touch of shame for not having studied them earlier, and so on. True intercultural or transcultural studies are not limited to studying others, but seek to assimilate, to introduce the categories and parameters of other cultures in order to understand the problems of our "own" reality, to comprehend our "own" problems as we see them. When we introduce in ourselves the parameters for understanding, for approaching the problems of reality, we produce a change within ourselves. The questions then also change—but this is another subject altogether.

Let us come back to Aristotle, from whom I would like to cite two phrases. At the beginning of his life he wrote that *philosophos philomithos pós estin* (the philosopher is in a sense a lover of myth).

And at the end of his life he wrote in a letter to Antipater: *hosō autites kai monōtes eimi philomithoteos gegona* (the more I become myself and am left alone—or, loosely translated, "as time passes"—the more I become a lover of myth). It is clear, therefore, that myth—the other part of the human *sophia*, the other side of logical thought—is also important and must not be forgotten.

This is what I call *mythophany* or mythical consciousness.

### Nine Aphorisms on Myth

In order to express all this in clear terms I will use nine *sūtras* (aphorisms, maxims, or principles), nine mythophanic principles set down very schematically.

#### *There Is No Phenomenology of Myth*

Strictly speaking, the phenomenology of myth is not possible. *Mythos* as a phenomenon does not exist. Myth does not appear to *logos*. The phenomenon, or that which appears to *logos*, is something different from *mythos*. To someone who is completely deaf and has never heard music, what appears of a ballet is not its totality but the movements of the dancing figures. The phenomenology of myth, in the strict sense of the word, is not possible because to *nous*, to *logos*, *mythos* is not a *phenomenon*. I would venture, incidentally, that *phainomenon* needs imagination, but not *nous*. Phenomenology is the interpretation of the phenomenon through *logos* in eidetic intuition, that is, in the discovery of the *nōema* in the pure intelligibility of the phenomenon. *Mythos*, however, is the phenomenon itself. This is why myth does not allow "hermeneutics." Hermeneutics of the myth cannot be possible. As soon as I feel the need to interpret, to act as intermediary, I am no longer in the myth, for the very reason that I need an intermediary, a go-between—and the most fitting intermediary is the *logos*. Myth does not allow itself to be interpreted by an intermediary; it would simply dissolve, it would become mythology in the sense we criticized earlier. The question, therefore, is whether there can be a mediator (and not merely an intermediary) of the myth. Let us, first of all, clarify the difference between *intermediary* and *mediator*. Christ, *totus Deus, totus homo*, is a mediator. Reason is an intermediary. Our question, therefore, is: Can we approach the myth without the need to interpret it? Can we narrate the myth, can we relate what it says, without interpreting what it means? This is the sphere of *mythophany*, which is different from that of phenomenology.

At this point we must make a digression of a somewhat academic nature. There are three great areas of human experience. Here again I will concentrate only on the Western world, using three Greek words. I would say that along with the Husserlian *noēma* there are two other immediate data of consciousness. The first is *pisteuma*. I believe that the phenomenology of religion is *sui generis* and cannot be reduced to phenomenology as such, unlike all the other types of phenomenology that I have so far encountered. For this reason I have ventured to introduce this new name: *pisteuma*, which originates from *pistis* (faith). Although Husserl did not invent the name *noēma* he did introduce it into phenomenology. *Pisteuma*, on the other hand, is what the believer believes. If I wanted to understand Hinduism, Bantu, or suchlike, by applying classical phenomenology I would not understand anything, because it is not a question of seeing what I understand but what the believer believes—what he thinks he understands (unless I set myself to be his judge). Therefore, if I cannot participate in the faith of the believer, then I cannot even describe what the believer believes. If I say, for example, that Durgā is the healing goddess of a certain sickness, and I clearly do not believe it, I can describe how a man prepares to bring his daughter to the goddess instead of the doctor (a decision we would regard as pure folly)—but I cannot describe the faith of the believer, the state of consciousness of the believer, because the faith of the believer belongs essentially to the religious phenomenon. If I am not able to participate in *pisteuma*, therefore, I cannot describe what the believer believes. In conclusion, there is no neutral, universal zone; we must first attain to *pisteuma*.

Along with *pisteuma* there is another immediate datum of consciousness—*mytheuma*. The word *mytheuma* must be distinguished from the theme or subject of the myth. The French use the term *mythème*—the theme of the myth. *Mytheuma* is not the theme of the myth; it is what appears in mythophany.

### *There Is Mythophany*

The second aphorism, or mythophanic principle, states that mythophany exists. Mythophany is not *mythologoumenon*, or the outer covering, the expression, the story of the myth. It is not even the hidden reality, the *noumenon* behind the phenomenon—it is something quite different. Mythophany is, literally, "the unsaid." *Mytheuma* is not the theme, the intellectual object, the rational translation, and that which the myth discovers or reveals is not the (rational) theme of the myth but the *mytheuma*.

Mythophany requires an ultimate awareness to be experienced in all its strength—the strength that the mystics speak of. "Y quedéme no sabiendo, toda ciencia transcendiendo," St. John of the Cross would say.

### *We Believe in Myth without Believing It*

Myth is what we believe in without even knowing we believe it. It is what we take for granted. We accept the fact so naturally that it is no longer talked about, simply because there is nothing to say; otherwise, we would have to begin a chain of questions of which the final link will never be found. Not because we reject or repress thought, but because there is nothing more to question. Every dialogue involves something more than what is being said, because what we mean is always different from what we say, and the person with whom I am speaking must grasp this without it being said. In a sense, the unsaid is what gives strength and substance to what is said. Yet the unsaid remains unsaid; the contradiction dissolves because we do not recognize our myths as myths; we need the other, we need dialogue, we need to overcome the ego; ultimately, we must overcome solipsism, the temptation of pure thought.

Vittorio Mathieu wrote a short but substantial essay for the review *Filosofía* on the subject of allusive thought, in which he says. "When, on the other hand, thought is allusive, it directs us toward a subject that cannot be thought, and the phrase toward a reality that cannot be spoken." The whole article, in fact, shows us how thought is allusive. This, I believe, is a key point in what I am attempting to get across. The Sanskrit concept of *dhvani* also refers thematically to this allusive thought, where neither connotation nor denotation are able to achieve or exhaust all that words can say. Yet thinking itself is also allusive, and this game that Mathieu speaks about is the starting point for a serious dialogue between Western thought and other forms of approach to reality.

### *We Cannot Approach Myth through Reflection*

Myth does not belong to the order of reflection. Myth is of the sphere of allusive thought. If we think about it, it disappears.

We can become aware of this reality only indirectly, considering, for example, the corrosive effect that thought has on everything we think, on everything it touches.

This is also the danger of theology. Each time I think about God I understand him less.

Mythical awareness is not reflectively aware. This is why myth is all the things I mentioned earlier: it is vulnerable, it cannot be explained, it has no ulterior motive nor can it account

for itself. Myth contains no standards for distinguishing a scoundrel from a saint. If I am in good faith I do not know that I am, nor do I know that am I not. This, for example, is what the *Keno-upaniṣad* states, and what strikes all philosophers who know that they do not know. "A just man," Meister Eckhart wrote in old German, acts "*sunder warumbe*," "without a why or a wherefore." Jacopone da Todi said the same thing: "La rosa non ha perché" (The rose has no wherefore). Myth does not belong to the sphere of reflection.

### *The Vehicle of Myth Is Faith*

Myth is carried by faith. Faith is trustful awareness, confident that something is, because it appears on a horizon that causes it to be as it is. Faith, clearly, is not the same as "belief." Belief is the intelligible formulation of what we believe. "Creed" comes from the Greek through the Latin. It is also found in Sanskrit: *śraddhā*, which means "there where I put my heart" (not my mind). Creed, *kardia, hridaya*; "to give the heart," *śraddhā*. In other words, faith has no object. The object of faith would be idolatry or a simple object of reason. As the ancient church fathers were known to say, "God can only be seen from behind"—not because my little reason cannot see face-to-face, but because if I saw God face-to-face, God would be an object of my vision and, therefore, would not be God but an object of consciousness. "Si quis videns Deum cognovit quod vidit, ipsum Deum non vidit" (If someone seeing God knows what he has seen, he has not seen God), wrote Dionysius the Aeropagite.

### *Myth Is Not the Object of Logical Thought*

As we know, all is connected. Myth is not an object of logical thought; it cannot be objectivated. It is like the symbol. The symbol either is or is not a symbol (unlike the sign), and therefore is neither subjective nor objective; otherwise it is not a symbol. If I have to explain the symbol, that through which I explain the symbol would become the real symbol. If the symbol does not appear immediately, without the need for explanation, it is not a symbol. Yet if the symbol is only symbol it is not even symbol. The symbol is not merely subjective. Mythical awareness is basically the same as symbolic consciousness—and symbolic consciousness is primary, anterior even to logical consciousness. Not only do we have the eyes of intelligence to see with, we also have the ears of the heart with which to hear.

In short, myth is without content. Myth does not contain, it implies.

What is clearly stated is no longer myth. Myth reveals the unspeakable, because it is not subordinated to *logos*. Myth is unthinkable. We must make a distinction between "unthinkable" and "unthought." There is awareness but not thought. Myth is seen, it is *felt*, it is heard as unthinkable. We are aware that it is unthinkable but this is not a contradiction. It would be a contradiction to think the unthought, because then it would become thought and no longer unthought. Myth, in fact, has this characteristic: since it is not the object of logical thought, it is always temporary, constantly on the move, in transit, *viator*. If we stop it, it ceases to be myth. If we think we have taken hold of it, it loses its essence as myth. It is like riding a bicycle—if you stop, you fall. Myth has this intrinsic nature of transience: it cannot look back, and it cannot look inside itself; just like when you learn to ride a bicycle—if you look at your feet, you fall. For this reason we always need someone else to tell us. It is the other who discovers my myth, just as it is another who discovers that I speak with an accent; I myself am not aware of it. I need the other to discover my myth. This truth brings us to the next aphorism.

*Every Myth Involves a Faith*

From the moment we stop believing in a myth, it ceases to be a myth and becomes a tale that we tell to others. Either you believe in it or not. And if you doubt, you have already begun to disbelieve. Reflection comes into play. There is, therefore, this other type of awareness—mythical awareness, which I am attempting to describe with the help of all these aphorisms. Myth has the nature of the wayfarer, the temporary. We discover it when it is no longer with us. Myth is a little like paradise, which is another myth. Its meaning lies in the fact that it is eternally "lost." We have lost it, but in the instant I realize I have lost it I am already regaining it, because I begin to look for it. Life has a nonreflective dimension. This is why we must have a pure heart, as almost all religions tell us—to live with the fullness of spontaneity and freedom.

*Myth Is Transparent*

Myth has a special kind of transparency. We believe in myth in the context of faith. When we do not believe, myth disappears. We do not know we believe, because it is transparent. We do not question the reasons of myth, therefore, precisely because we believe. Light, for example, is invisible. It is not luminous itself, but it is what allows us to see. We see when light hits an opaque object, causing it to become luminous. Between the sun and the earth there is only darkness. How does that light reach us? Myth helps us to see, but it is itself invisible; it cannot be seen. This is why myth is essentially collective.

*Myth Is "Unspoken"*

Pure myth is always unspoken. In this case there are no pure chemical elements. Myth is always in motion; it disappears whenever we try to comprehend it, only to reappear elsewhere. This is why I am attempting to "demystify" the fallacy of demystification. Certainly, we can disclose a myth, and then it is no longer convincing; we can provide a rational, more believable explanation. Yet all we are doing is re-mythicizing, focusing on a different myth, changing myth.

**Corollaries**

Let us now make a more schematic summary of all we have said.

*There is no myth without logos:* This fact must be emphasized. It is without *logos* as *legein*, without *logos* as hearing, or without *logos* as the structure or skeleton that we can, in a sense, see. Thus man set apart from all tradition would cease to be man.

Yet, vice versa, *there is no logos without myth*. The word is word because it breaks the silence, because it is always more than pure word or pure meaning or pure content. The word is alive because it contains *mythos* and because every *logos* always falls within our context. And our context, in turn, has been shaped by another myth. *Logos* needs myth in order to exist and to carry the truth, or else it falls into fanaticism. I do not possess the truth. As Thomas Aquinas said, we do not possess the truth, but the truth possesses us; it cannot be possessed, but we are possessed by it, and if we are possessed, we are not its masters.

### Rosmini and Us

In conclusion, I would like to refer once again to Rosmini who, in his day, put forward the audacious idea of *intellectual perception*, an idea that I found to be very similar to that of John Smith, one of the Neoplatonists of Cambridge, when he speaks of *spiritual sensation*. More recently also, in his last posthumous book, *Inteligencia sentiente*, Spanish contemporary philosopher Xavier Zubiri defends a similar idea. The other bold idea presented by Rosmini was the conception of a fundamental feeling that is not dualistic.

### The Contemporary Situation

I would say, *mutatis mutandis, maximis augendis, and minutis minuendis*, something similar for our time. I say *mutatis mutandis* because the situation today is different, but I add *maximis augendis* because it seems to me that the problem of our time is of much greater importance than the problem that concerned all of the last century and the post-Enlightenment era. The world situation today is serious. Today no culture and no religion is self-sufficient or capable of solving human situations and problems. We find ourselves at a point that is not only important in history but represents a true turning point. What is going through a crisis is history itself, the last six thousand years of historical life on earth. Why have I also added *minutis minuendis*? Because, as Rosmini himself also reminds us, one of the first things that each of us must do is "deeply recognize our own nothingness." This is one of the challenges at the heart of Western thought, of *logos* and of all it involves. Alongside *logos* there is the Spirit.

THE LAW OF *KARMAN* AND  
THE HISTORICAL DIMENSION OF MAN

*iyam karmangatir vicitrā  
durvijñānā ca.*

*This course of *karman* is mysterious  
and difficult to discern.*

*YSB II.13<sup>1</sup>*

**The Problem**

Contemporary Man reflects critically on his historical situation and asks himself whether historicity is not a constitutive dimension of his being. Westerners tend to consider historicity a characteristic almost peculiar to Semitic-Christian culture and are somewhat proud of this monopoly. Starting with the assumption that nowadays any problem that is not stated in universal terms contains a methodological flaw from the very outset, the aim of this study is to offer some considerations on the historical nature of Man, taking into account the concept of *karman*.<sup>2</sup> It should be said from the very beginning that the purpose of this paper is not to compare the Indic concept of *karman* with the Western concept of historicity, because in neither camp do these concepts appear clear-cut. There is a multitude of opinions on the matter both in India and the West. Further, I wish not to compare the two concepts in any strict sense, but to understand and deepen a philosophical (or religious) problem with the aid of more than one philosophical (or religious) tradition. What I would like to attempt is a clarification of an authentic philosophical problem with all the tools at my disposal, that is, with the insights and ideas I may have learned from both traditions. By tools I do not mean only external instruments for expressing an idea but also internal means for grasping the particular problem. A real culture not only provides tools; it also offers the very field in which these tools are effective.

In R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979; reprint Bangalore: ATC, 1983), chap. 14; *Mito, fede ed ermeneutica. Il triplice velo della realtà* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2000).

<sup>1</sup> *Vicitrā* may also mean variegated, manifold, strange, wonderful, etc.; *durvijñānā*, understanding with difficulty.

<sup>2</sup> The proper form for this neuter noun is *karman*. English literature often uses *karma*, and in this form it has passed into common usage. We shall also use the adjectival form "karmic," an acceptable and almost unavoidable neologism.

Formulating the rules for a meeting of cultures is an urgent need of our times.<sup>3</sup> No particular culture has the right to set the pattern, and no pattern can be set without a certain preunderstanding of the other culture. A pattern can be established only if some people succeed in undergoing a genuine internal experience of both cultures. Extrapolation will not do here. Only living "rosettas" will help the mutual decipherment.

The ideal is to discover the growing points in one culture that are sensitive to the problems of another culture. In this way a natural growth becomes possible, through a cultural metabolism that combines endogenous and exogenous elements in assimilable portions.

I stress that this is relevant not only theoretically but also at the most practical and concrete political level. Today the world is impelled toward a common destiny. Oriental ways of life are emigrating West, Marxist ideologies of many types are taking root in Asian fields. Social or rather socialist consciousness is emerging violently in this—Eastern—part of the world. Allergies, schizophrenias, repressions, and obsessions are maladies that afflict not only individuals but also societies. I consider the topic of this study vitally important and plead for insight and collaboration; repentance and true revolution go together. Otherwise we have only chaos, repression, and counterrepres-

### Some Indological Notes

*Karman* is a noun meaning action and comes from the root *kr*, "doing, acting, performing, and so on." The concept and even the Sanskrit word are found in most Asian religious traditions from ancient *brahmanism* to modern Japanese Buddhism. Beginning about three millennia ago, it has a long history, from Iran to Japan, from Mongolia to Borneo. There is hardly a more widespread concept. In general, one could say that a trait common to almost all Asian religions is the acceptance of the central intuition underlying *karman*.

Little wonder, then, that the meaning of *karman* varies from one extreme to the other on the scale of possible interpretations, and yet it seems that one fundamental intuition underlies all the meanings. This basic concept I would like to examine in one of its aspects *only*, namely, what in modern Western languages could be rendered by "historicity," understood as an anthropocosmic dimension.

From among the many Asian traditions, I have chosen the Sanskritic Indic one for reasons of expediency. I could equally have chosen the Buddhist line, which is also of Indic origin, and in fact the acme and the most penetrating analysis of *karman* is to be found there. Buddhism affirms pure *karman* because there is no *ātman* to offer any resistance to it or to condense or condition *karman*. There are only the acts themselves (*karman*) and their fruits (which again produce new acts), without any actor or agent (*kartṛ*). As a matter of fact, the Buddhist intuition may be nearer to the ideas developed here, but it is more challenging to take up the *ātmavādīc* line of Indic thought to make this interpretation more convincing. Similar studies of other sources may qualify some of my statements, but I would venture to say that on the whole they would substantiate from another angle what I am propounding.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup> See a single and typical example of the Sikh Scriptures (fifteenth century): "Karman determines how you are born, but it is through grace [nadar] that the door of salvation is found" (*Japji* 4).

*The Vedas and Brāhmaṇas*

In the *Rg Veda*, *karman* in its many forms appears a number of times with the meaning of action, especially sacred action, sacrifice.<sup>5</sup> Scholars discuss whether the idea of rebirth is present in the *Rg Veda* or not.<sup>6</sup> The texts are not clear and certainly do not use *karman* to express what could be interpreted as reaping in another life the fruits of a previous one.<sup>7</sup> The only text traditionally given in support of the rebirth theory says,

Your eye will have to go to the Sun;  
 your spirit (*ātmā*) will have to go to the Wind;  
 Go to heaven or earth according to your merit (*dharmayā*),  
 or go to the waters if this is your lot;  
 settle down among the plants with all your bones.\*

This text could be read against the background of many others.<sup>8</sup> The meaning is that the life of the individual has neither an absolute beginning nor an absolute end and that the many constituents of life continue their existence in other realms of the world. Significantly, the word *karman* does not appear. *Dharma* is used instead.

What is stressed again and again in the *Rg Veda* is the fact that human fullness and cosmic salvation are reached only through the sacred action, the sacrifice that completes the creative action by which the world came into being and continues to exist.<sup>10</sup>

The *Atharva-veda* has some passages stressing the importance of *karman*,<sup>11</sup> and in one text it seems to correct or complement the Rig Vedic vision of a famous hymn that says that ardor or energy was the origin of cosmic order and of truth,<sup>12</sup> affirming that this energy or ardor (*tapas*) was born from *karman*.<sup>13</sup> This universe is the fruit of a divine action, and through another set of integral or theandric actions it is conserved and saved.<sup>14</sup>

This is the main idea the *Brāhmaṇas* will develop, that the sacrifice or sacred action is the ultimate cause and dynamic of this world.<sup>15</sup> Now if sacred action has such power, the

\* For example: I.22.19; I.31.8; I.55.3; I.61.13; I.62.6; I.101.4; I.102.6; I.112.12; I.121.11; II.21.1; II.24.14; III.33.7; VI.37.2; VIII.21.2; VIII.36.7; VIII.37.7; VIII.38.1; IX.46.3; IX.88.4; IX.96.11; X.28.7; X.66.9; X.55.8; etc.

\* See R. Panikkar, "Algunos aspectos de la espiritualidad hindú," in *Historia de la Espiritualidad*, ed. L. Sala Balust and B. Jiménez Duque (Barcelona: Flors, 1969), esp. 466–74, for further development of this idea.

<sup>7</sup> See *RV* IX.59.2 where the word *dhīṣāṇā* is used to denote the priestly work, the sacred work, the action of the Gods. From the root *dhī*, put. See also I.22.1; I.102.1; I.96.1; I.109.4; III.2.1; IV.34.1; X.17.12; X.30.6; etc.

<sup>8</sup> *RV* X.16.3. See Muir, op. cit. V.298.

<sup>9</sup> See *RV* X.90.13; *AV* V.9.7; V.10.8; VIII.2.3; XI.8.31; XXIV.9; *SB* I.5.3.4; VI.2.2.27; X.3.3.7; XI.8.4.6; *TB* III.10.8.5; *BU* III.2.13.

<sup>10</sup> See R. Panikkar, *Le mystère du culte dans l'hindouisme et le christianisme* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 53–58, and also the pertinent Vedic texts in my book *The Vedic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> *AV* VIII.2.15; XVIII.3.13; XVIII.4.62; etc.

<sup>12</sup> *RV* X.190.1.

<sup>13</sup> *AV* XI.8.6.

<sup>14</sup> We could adduce here that half verse of the *YV* III.47: *akram karman karmankṛtab* [having worked their work the workers of work], having performed their work; a text that, though the context may be different, has also been utilized for the theory of *karman*.

<sup>15</sup> See *SB* X.5.9–10.

human being is responsible for using it properly. Moreover, the world itself depends on the performance of such acts. And here we have in a nutshell all the future motifs of *karman*. In the *Satapatha-brāhmaṇa* we find that "a Man is born into the world he has made,"<sup>16</sup> and that the idea of judgment according to one's deeds is already common.<sup>17</sup>

*The Upaniṣads*

Perhaps the earliest text concerning what is called *transmigration* is found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad*,<sup>18</sup> which sums up a long development of thought. Later in that *Upaniṣad* we find,

Now this Self (*ātman*) is brahman indeed. It consists of understanding (*vijñāna*), mind (*manas*), life-breath (*prāṇa*), sight (*cakṣuhḥ*) and hearing (*śrotra*) of earth (*prthivi*), water (*āpah*), wind (*vāyu*) and space (ether, *ākāśa*), light (*tejas*) and darkness (*atejas*<sup>19</sup>), loving desire (*kāma*) and indifference (*akāma*), anger (*krodha*) and non-anger (*akrodha*), righteousness (*dharma*) and the absence of it (*adharma*); it consists of all things. This is the meaning of the saying: it consists of this, it consists of that.

As one acts (*karman*), as one behaves, so does one become (*yathākāri yathācāri tathā bhavati*). Acting well something becomes good, acting ill it becomes evil. By meritorious acts one becomes meritorious (*punyāḥ punyena karmanā bhavati*), by sinful acts, sinful (*pāpah*).

Some have said: this person (*puruṣa*) consists of loving desire (*kāma*) alone. As his loving desire, so his will (*kratu*), as his will, so will he act (*karman*); as he acts so will he attain.<sup>20</sup>

The operant ideas are clearly visible if we take into account the whole context. Man is an aggregate or a principle of activities that have a wider repercussion than he imagines. His actions as well as his constitutive elements are not his private monopoly; they belong to the wide world and to the wide world they return; Man has an ontological and not merely an ethical stewardship. Man's actions receive not only reward and punishment, they also carry an ontological weight that does not depend only on the private endowment of their actual performer.

The passage from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* that answers the one just quoted is worth summarizing, for it opens up the actual meaning of the text. Jāratkārava Ārthabhbhāga is questioning the great Yājñavalkya regarding several problems; they come to discuss the meaning of life and its connection with death. What happens at death?

"When a person dies, what is it that does not depart from him?"<sup>21</sup>

After having answered that it is the name that is infinite and immortal, Yājñavalkya goes on to disclose the cosmic law of the conservation of all the elements in the universe:

<sup>16</sup> *SB* VI.2.2.27.

<sup>17</sup> See *SB* X.3.1; XI.2.7.33.

<sup>18</sup> See *BU* III.2.12–13.

<sup>19</sup> *Tejas-atejas* could also be translated as heat and cold, energy and inertia.

<sup>20</sup> *BU* IV.4.5.

<sup>21</sup> *BU* III.2.12.

"... the voice enters into the fire, the life-breath into the air (or, goes with the wind), the eye into the sun, the mind into the moon, the ear into the regions, the body into the earth, the self into the space . . ."

What then happens to this person?

"Ārthabhāga, my friend," said he, "take my hand. We two alone shall know about this. It is not for us to unfold this in public." Away they went together and together they spoke with one another. What they were discussing was *karman* and what they were praising was *karman*. Indeed one becomes meritorious by meritorious action and sinful by sinful action. Then Jāratkārava Ārthabhāga kept his peace in silence.<sup>22</sup>

Here *karman* no longer appears as the sacrificial act or, as in the *Gītā*, the truly moral and thus ontologically real action, but as that core that remains of the person and yet transcends all individuality.

Many other places in the *Upaniṣads* stress the peculiar nature of *karman*,<sup>23</sup> the cosmic destiny of Man's actions,<sup>24</sup> the importance of a man's last acts,<sup>25</sup> the continuation of Man's attributes<sup>26</sup> and the inherent justice of this procedure,<sup>27</sup> the details of the transmission,<sup>28</sup> the end of the deeds retaining one on earth,<sup>29</sup> the nature of release<sup>30</sup> and its release to the sacrifice,<sup>31</sup> and so on.<sup>32</sup>

We may sum it all up with a short sentence from a relatively late *Upaniṣad*: "The doer of the acts . . . he is the enjoyer."<sup>33</sup>

### Tradition

It may suffice to adduce some recognized texts. The *Bhagavad-gītā* could be said to be the consecration of the way of *karman* to such an extent that for the *Gītā*, *karman* is the constitutive element of our creatureliness.<sup>34</sup> A substantial part of it is dedicated to this theme; chapters II and III deal thematically with the question of action and inaction, works and not works.<sup>35</sup> The law of *karman* is fully recognized.

The *Brahmasūtra* contributes two important passages that also supply a leading thread to the development of the idea in the traditional commentaries throughout the centuries.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *BU* III.2.13.

<sup>23</sup> See *MaitU* III.2.1-3.

<sup>24</sup> See *CUV*.10.7.

<sup>25</sup> See *MaitU* VI.34.2-3.

<sup>26</sup> See *KausU* 1.2; *SU* VI.7.11.

<sup>27</sup> See *BU* IV.4.23; IV.3.8-9; *KathU* V.7; *MundU* I.2.7.

<sup>28</sup> See *KausU* II.15.

<sup>29</sup> *MundU* II.2, 8; *IsU* 2.

<sup>30</sup> *MundU* III.2.7.

<sup>31</sup> See *KausU* II.6.

<sup>32</sup> See, besides, *MaitU* II.6-7; *CUV*.3; *BU* I.3.10; *KathU* I.1.5-6.

<sup>33</sup> *SU* V.7.

<sup>34</sup> *BG* VIII.3.

<sup>35</sup> See some fundamental references: *BG* II.42-43; II.47-57; III.4-9; III.14-15; III.19-20; III.22-25; IV.14-24; IV.32-33; V.1-14; XVIII.2-25.

<sup>36</sup> *BS* III.1.17; IV.1.15, and the *bhāṣyas* on them.

The *Yogasūtras* also offer some basic references to the understanding of *karman*. Iṣvara, the Lord, is a special kind of Self precisely because he is untouched by *karman*.<sup>37</sup> Release amounts to the cessation of all *karman*,<sup>38</sup> obtained by eliminating all latent deposits of *karman*,<sup>39</sup> a process that entails alternate advance and recession in the development of *karman*,<sup>40</sup> neither of which need be conscious.<sup>41</sup> Only he who witnesses to his own self (*ātmasāk-ṣākāra*) over against the individualistic "I-am-ness" (*asmitā*) reaches salvation.<sup>42</sup>

The discussion of the relation between the theology of works and that of knowledge, or between the way of sacred or secular action and the way of traditional or modern scientific knowledge, may be said to be one of the pivots of all Indic culture from its beginning until our own days.<sup>43</sup> There is a striking continuity discernible only to a sociologist: today's temples may be new constructions, but the rites are ancient.<sup>44</sup>

To offer a representative example of the traditional Indic thinking, I would like to quote one passage from the Prince of the *advaita*:

But, to raise a new objection, there exists no transmigrating soul different from the Lord and obstructed by impediments of knowledge; for śruti expressly declares that "there is no other seer but he; there is no other knower but he" (BU III.7.23). How then can it be said that the origination of knowledge in the transmigrating soul depends on a body, while it does not so in the case of the Lord?—True, we reply. *There is in reality no transmigrating soul different from the Lord.*<sup>45</sup>

Still the connection (of the Lord) with limiting adjuncts, consisting of bodies and so on, is assumed, just as we assume the ether to enter into connection with diverse limiting adjuncts such as jars, pots, caves, and the like. And just as in consequence of connections of the latter kind, such conceptions and terms as "the hollow (space) of the jar," and so on, are generally current, although the space inside a jar is not really different from universal space, and just as in consequence thereof there generally prevails the false notion that there are different spaces such as the space of a jar and so on; so there prevails likewise the false notion that the Lord and the transmigrating soul are different; a notion due to the non-discrimination of the (unreal) connection of the soul with the limiting conditions, consisting of the body and so on. That the Self, although in reality the only existence, imparts the quality of Selfhood to bodies and the like which are Not-Self is a matter of observation, and is due to mere wrong

<sup>37</sup> YS I.24.

<sup>38</sup> YS IV.30.

<sup>39</sup> YS 11.12.

<sup>40</sup> YS III.22.

<sup>41</sup> YS IV.7.

<sup>42</sup> YS 11.6.

<sup>43</sup> India stresses the threefold ways of works (*arman*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and loving faith (*bhakti*), just as the theologies of James, John, and Paul, respectively, emphasized these three *kāṇdas*.

<sup>44</sup> See, as an example, the passionate plea for modernity by A. D. Moddie, *The Brahmanical Culture and Modernity* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1968).

<sup>45</sup> Emphasis added. The text says literally: *satyānā nesvarād anyah; samsāri* [In truth no other than the Lord wanders through]. As a noun, *samsāra* means a going or wandering through, and is a compound of *sam* and the root *sṛ*, which, like the root *sru*, means flow. *Sam-sṛ* is thus the verbal form meaning flow together with, go about, wander or walk or roam through. See its usages in Monier-Williams's *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. One could equally have translated: "In truth no other (or no different) than the Lord transmigrates."

conception, which depends in its turn upon an antecedent wrong conception. And the consequence of the soul thus involving itself in the transmigratory state is that its thought depends on a body and the like.<sup>46</sup>

No need to comment; the texts show that the locus of the *karman* theory is not merely the ethical realm, but that it is intrinsic to a whole conception of reality.

As for the rest of Indic tradition, we are here assuming that it, together with its Western counterpart, is sufficiently known.<sup>47</sup>

### Summary

In attempting to bring together the many threads of Indic tradition we can detect three operant ideas:

1. *Karman* as the saving sacrificial action; sacrifice understood as the truly theandric action by which the human and the divine collaborate to maintain the universe and cause it to reach its goal. This aspect, which is the original idea, is expressed in the *Vedas* and the *Brāhmaṇas*.

2. *Karman* as *karmanmārga*, that is, the path of action, of good works, as the way to human salvation and fulfillment. Action is inevitable and so not entangling if performed in the right way, with the right spirit. Not detachment from action is required, but non-attachment in action from its expected fruits. The *Bhagavad-gītā* still remains the highest example of this attitude.

3. *Karman* as the subtle structure of temporal reality that remains once the *prima facie* elements have faded away or been transformed, as that which all existing beings have in common. Here the concept of historicity, in the human and cosmic sense, finds its place. The lasting message of the *Upaniṣad* accentuates this aspect, which also underlies all the philosophical schools. Yoga, for instance, has developed many physical and spiritual implications of this experience.

<sup>46</sup> Śaṅkara, *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* I.1.5, according to the English translation of G. Thibaut, *The Vedānta-Sūtras with the Commentary by Śaṅkarācārya, The Sacred Books of the East*, ed. F. Max Müller, vol. 34 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsiādass, 1962), 51–52.

<sup>47</sup> The following literature may be useful, in addition to general works on Indic philosophy: E. Benz, ed., "Reinkarnation. Die Lehre von der Seelenwanderung in der philosophischen und religiösen Diskussion heute," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* IX.2 (Köln: Brill); E. S. Deutsch, "Karman as 'Convenient Fiction' in the Advaita Vedānta," *Philosophy East and West* 15, no. 1 (January 1965): 3–12; R. De Smet, "The Law of Karman," *Indian Phil. Annal.* 11 (1966): 328–55; M. Falk, "Nairātmya and Karman," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 16 (1940): 429–64, 647–82; J. N. Farquhar, "Karman: Its Value as a Doctrine of Life," *Hibbert Journal* 20 (1921–22): 2–34; H. von Glasenapp, *Doctrine of Karman in Jaina Philosophy* (Bombay, 1942); E. W. Hopkins, "Modifications of the Karma Doctrine," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1906): 581–92; (1907): 665–72; C. Humphreys, *Karman and Rebirth* (London, 1943); C. G. Jung, "Die verschiedenen Aspekte der Wiedergeburt," *Eranos Jahrbuch* (Zurich: Rhein, 1939), 399–447; Umesh Mishra, "The Annihilation of Karman," *Proceedings of the All India Oriental Conference* 7 (1935): 467–80; K. H. Potter, "Naturalism and Karma: A Reply (D. Walhout, A Critical Note on Potter's Interpretation of Karma)," *Philosophy East and West* 18 (1968): 82–84; R. De Smet, "A Copernican Reversal: The Gitākāra's Reformulation of Karma," *Philosophy East and West* 28, no. 1 (January 1977): 53–63.

### The Karmic Conception of the Universe

To explain the karmic conception of the world, I will now break up this unitary vision into a few particular rays, each of which may give us in prismatic refraction one of the colors of the spectrum. There are three fundamental options regarding the nature of the human person, all of them well represented throughout the history of thought.

First, the core of the human being has never been born, therefore neither does it die. Birth and death are only "epiphenomena," superficial appearances. Only the body is born and dies, not the real person. The Self that has to be realized was always there and remains untouched by the temporal flow of external events. Real human freedom is a direct consequence of this vision: Man is above the superficial events of history. This is the option Indic culture has stressed.

Second, the core of the human being is certainly born, but it does not die; it is immortal. Man has a soul that has originated either in this world or in another stage of existence, but that will never cease to exist. Each person is sacred and an end in itself because of the immortal soul it embodies. Human dignity is linked with this idea. This is the option Greek and post-Hellenic culture has emphasized.

Third, the core of the human being is both born and mortal. It comes into existence as a really new and fresh beginning. Man is real, but he also has a real end, a human annihilation: Man is mortal. The direct consequence of this attitude is an urge to better the human condition and to work for this world as long as there is still time. This is the option modern secularism underscores.

My contention is that the insight of *karman*, like many other fundamental human intuitions, has a cross-cultural value because, though wrapped in a certain cultural garb, it is intended to explain a basic human attitude. Thus, although traditionally linked with the first option, it can serve equally well as a fruitful hypothesis for the other two. The nature of *karman* will of course be interpreted differently, but its quintessence, so to speak, will be the same in all three cases.

In the first option, *karman* stands for what has to be burned away, the obstacle to realization. It is the coefficient of *illusion* and *unreality*.

In the second, *karman* represents the raw material, as it were, that the immortal soul must elaborate (or assimilate) in order to disentangle itself (or grow to the point of liberation) from the temporal and mortal world. *Karman* here is the coefficient of *creatureliness*.

In the third, *karman* is identified with Man himself. The *humanum* consists of the karmic contents of the universe that bridge the gulf between the individual and the world. *Karman* is the anthropological coefficient of reality, of *humanness*.

In all three conceptions, however, there remains an underlying unity that may be brought to light by simple semantics. *Karman* has been translated as *work*, but in modern languages this word does not convey all the aspects of *karman*. It should rather be rendered as action in the Scholastic sense of *actio*, taken both actively and passively (*active et passive sumpta*), that is, it is at once the metamorphic power that turns the wheel of existence and the passive material to be metamorphosed, burned, annihilated. It is that action by which the world comes into being and perdures, the action whose echoes ring in every nook and cranny of being, the action that every deed and activity only mirrors, gives back, individualizes, channels, expresses, and lays bare. It is the act and the acted (thing), the action and the effect of the act. *Karman* stands for the undivided, a-dualistic view of reality where the act is not severed from its effect. The act is act precisely because it has its own

effect, because it acts. The karmic view of reality is thus the integrated insight that links all things together, allowing for differentiation and discrimination, but not for separation or ontological dichotomies.

*The Mythical and the Mythological*

Popular belief, East and West, usually holds that the theory of *karman* means what the names "transmigration" and "rebirth" encompass. According to this belief, you, individual *E*, are going to be born in an individual *F* according to your *karman*, that is, according to your deeds, good or bad, so that as a reward or punishment you are reborn in a higher or lower being. When *E* was born he inherited the past *karman* of individual *D*, and so the karmic line has neither beginning nor end, except for the released person, the saint, who has burned all his *karman* and leaves behind no remnant with which to be born again. This interpretation, first of all, gives every individual a chance to win eternal life, if not at one stroke, then after a number of births. Second, it gives a *prima facie* account of two scandalous human facts: the inequalities of nature and society on the one hand, and the problem of evil and suffering on the other. As to how these past *karmans* came into existence, different schools propound different theories, including human free will.

I submit that this picture is a simple caricature of something that gets fundamentally distorted in passing from the mythical to the mythological. A parallel example in Christian thought would be to consider heaven a big air-conditioned hall where for all eternity the Christian God amuses and entertains his worshipers who behaved bravely on earth, or as a paradise where all the desires repressed in earthly existence find their fulfillment.

I do not mean to suggest that popular beliefs are wrong. I am only insisting that the passage from the mythical to the mythological represents a *metabasis eis allo genos*, a passage to another genre, which disfigures the original image. Those who live in a particular myth express their beliefs in terms and images that lose their message and truth the moment they are uprooted from their original soil. The words may be the same, but their meaning has completely shifted. Our problem is the more aggravated in that it involves not only the passage from one particular kind of understanding to another, but also from one particular culture and worldview to a completely foreign one. To begin with, even the terms we use—"metempsychosis," "transmigration," "rebirth," et al.—are either misnomers or mistranslations.<sup>48</sup>

Here *mythical* refers to all those symbols and contents we take for granted, the horizon over against which our conceptions of reality are intelligible. *Mythological* is intended to express that conscious awareness that results when the *logos* enters into the myth and partially transposes mythical contents into a logical context. Mythological reduction more or less conserves the "letter" or formal aspects of the myths without conserving belief in them. By this very fact mythology changes the object of mythical consciousness; that is, mythical intentionality points to something altogether different from its mythological contents. The God of my beliefs—*Siva*, *Zeus*, *Yahweh*, or any other—is my myth; the concept of God you may make of it without believing in him is the mythology you draw from my myth. Similarly, Democracy, Justice, Patriotism, or whatever ideal I may believe in, without knowing in *what* I believe, and that directs my course of action constitutes my myth; your concepts of my values, in which you yourself do not believe, constitute the mythology you discover in my beliefs. We all live in myths and at times we all discover the mythological contents of

<sup>48</sup> See as recent examples J. Head and S. L. Cranston, ed. and comp., *Reincarnation* (New York: Julian Press/Crown, 1977), with its six hundred pages of text; and Q. Howe Jr., *Reincarnation for the Christian* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974).

some of them and so discard and replace them by means of the *logos*, that is, by the self-aware and critical faculty of human knowledge. The passage from myth to *logos* makes for human culture and civilization, but the recession from forgotten *logoi* into the magma of new and emerging myths is what accounts for the inexhaustibility of human progress—without ever reaching the heavens as at Babel.

My task here is to discover whether it is possible to explain the mythical without mythological distortion. The key to the procedure is a belief in truth, which must accompany us throughout our inquiry.

Our quest is the more important because the theory of *karman* is probably the result of a historical process of secularization from the Vedic and *brahmanic* conception of sacrifice to the general understanding of life itself as a kind of sacrifice. The idea could perhaps be summarized in this way: sacrifice is the sacred action par excellence that brings salvation and various kinds of well-being (according to the type of sacrifice offered). It is not difficult to see that the danger of magic and priestly exploitation is all too near. So salvation and well-being needed to be rescued from the danger of dependence on the priestly class or on external ritual observances. The idea of *karman* offers the desired solution. The whole of life resembles a rite conducive to salvation and happiness; sacred actions are not a few acts performable only by experts or through them, but comprise the whole of human activities. The sacred has shifted from the altar to the sphere of life. In this way the theory of *karman* was experienced as a liberating process from a certain conception of the sacred. "As a Man sows so will he reap" might be a simple formulation of it, or "As the acts so the results." We should be very prudent and careful with words, but a certain wind of secularization could be detected in this process.

#### *Karman and the Cosmos*

The first general idea of *karman* is that it expresses cosmic solidarity and ontological relationship.

It has been said time and again that the idea of *karman* denotes universality, that it is the causal link at work in the universe. Everything has a cause and produces an effect because the universe is a *kosmos*, an order, and not a chaos.<sup>49</sup> The idea of *karman* gives expression, first of all, to this interrelatedness of everything in the world: nothing gets lost, nothing is isolated or disconnected, any action reverberates to the very limits of universe; there are no hidden or secret actions on the karmic level.

Whatever its ontological constitution, the law of *karman* is universal. It pervades the whole universe and is coextensive with it almost by definition, so that if anything escaped the law of *karman* it would also escape the realm of world-reality. Not only are all transformations in some way the fruit of *karman*, but the underlying structure that makes the transformation possible and intelligible is also related to *karman*.

The Greek intuition "the world is *kosmos* and not *chaos*" finds its counterpart in the Asian insight "The world is *karman* and not *brahman*," meaning: this world or (as many texts of the Scriptures say) "all this" (*idam sārvam*), that is, all that falls or can fall within the range of experience (of any kind) is *karman*. This is to say, it is all ordered and causally connected;

<sup>49</sup> The Greek word *κοσμος* originally meant order and good order, both in the material and moral sense. Then it came to mean ornament, organization, constitution, glory, etc., and then the world, the inhabited world, etc. It is probably connected with the Latin *cens* and the Sanskrit *samsati*. See the root *sās* (śiṣ), order. See P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1970), in hoc loco, though he does not give the Sanskrit root.

it all builds a net of relationships between actions and reactions in which some convergences have the power to direct the threads in one or another direction, thus building up or reducing the karmic structure of the universe.

At this point one can determine that the two main areas of study for defining the nature of *karman* are its relation with the Absolute and its relation with the individual.

### *Karman and the Absolute*

*Karman* is this cosmos. It is the peculiar causal structure of this universe and phenomenologically it shows itself as a pattern of pure relationship. In other words, *karman* is not the Absolute but rather the very symbol of the non-absolute. It stands for that factor, that aspect (real or unreal, according to one's school) that distinguishes earthly existence from Absolute Being. Just as it is redundant to speak of an ordered cosmos, it is redundant to speak of a karmic world. The whole universe is *karman*; indeed, it is nothing but a concentration of *karman*, a crystallizing of karmic lines crossing one another to give the impression (again, true or false according to various schools) of this earthly reality.

The law of *karman* governs the entire "contingent" world, the whole "created" universe, all "nonreal" Being, all "provisional" existence, the whole of "temporal" reality. Whatever *karman* may be, it is not *brahman*, not *nirvāṇa*, not *mokṣa*, not *sat* (when considered as absolute being), and so forth. On the contrary, *karman* has to do with *samsāra* (the world), *kāla* (time), *duḥkha* (suffering), and the whole human and cosmic pilgrimage toward realization. *Karman* is the symbol of the relative, the changing, the provisional and temporal. The locus of *karman* is the temporal existence of reality, the temporal existence of this world and, above all, of Man.

*Karman* means the non-absolute in a logical, epistemological, and ontological sense.

Logically, *karman* is essentially relationship, mutual relatedness, and so mutual dependence; it is the relative par excellence and not the absolute, the unrelated.

From an epistemological slant, karmic knowledge is knowledge about the "working" of the universe, the know-how about the mutual relationship among things. It is phenomenal knowledge or scientific knowledge. The knowledge of *karman* will not tell us what things are, but how they "work," behave, act, and react. It will tell us nothing about the ultimate nature of things, only about their pragmatic interactions.

From the ontological point of view, *karman* is what claims to be non-absolute, passing, provisional, not ultimate and definitive. Practically every ontology that deals with the notion of *karman* will distinguish a double level: the real, absolute, metaphysical, and eternal level (called *pāramārthika*, *nitya*, *sat*, *ātman*, and so on.), and the unreal, relative, phenomenal, and temporal one (called *vyāvahārika*, *anitya*, *asat*, *ānātman*, and so on.). One of the thorniest problems of Indic philosophies is how to relate these two levels.

So *karman* is the earthly realm of intraworldly causality. It represents the mutual cause-and-effect relation between all beings of the universe and their mutual repercussions. *Karman* is thus the nonmetaphysical structure of reality. To know what is beyond *karman* or how to transcend it constitutes the goal of most philosophical systems in India.

### *Karman and the Individual*

The karmic worldview is a phenomenal and non-absolute worldview. Further, it is a nonindividualistic conception of the factual structure of the universe that in fact cannot be individualized. When everything is seen as a net of causal gross and subtle relationship, there

is no possible criterion for an ontological dividing line between individuals. The individual can only be a pragmatic device for naming things or for manipulating phenomena. The net of relationships constituting the karmic structure of reality (real or unreal, according to the several systems) has no loose threads, no limits, no points of privilege that might indicate the beginning or end of any one individual.<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, we lack a criterion for individualization. If there were such a thing as a *pure* individual, that is, sheer unrelatedness, it would for this very reason be outside the karmic realm. It would not be karmically detectable, it would exist outside the realm of mutual causality. It would be unconditioned, and this can only be God, the Absolute, the *puruṣa* of Sāṃkhya, or an *avatāra*, a descent of the divine, a mutation or rather a discontinuity in the karmic structure of the world. In Buddhism it can only be *nirvāṇa*. If there is something outside time and causality, outside the reach of mutual relations and influences, it can by definition only be the realm of the Absolute. With this in mind, many a system of Indic philosophy become understandable. If we postulate the existence of a *jīva*, *puruṣa*, *ātman*, a soul above the karmic realm, it can only be uncreated and so divine, belonging to another world.

We could put the same idea the other way round. There are no privileged individuals because each thing is unique. Each point, each karmic crossing, as it were, is unique. This is the well-known theory of momentariness so thoroughly developed in Buddhist philosophy. All that exists is only a succession of moments of existence (or of consciousness, according to how one stresses the relation between existence and consciousness).

It needs to be added that this conception makes sense only if accompanied by a spiritual quest for perfection, that is, for salvation. The fact that you discover the karmic nature of the universe indicates that there is "something" that belongs to another realm, or more accurately, that there is nothing within the karmic structure that can appease the existential urge for "salvation." A fundamental distinction seems relevant here if we are to understand the deep intuition underlying *karman*: the distinction between individual and person.

Without embarking on specific philosophical considerations, we may readily agree that the notion of individuality is based on a numerical distinction and, as such, it needs some material basis for its expression. An individual is a singularity somehow complete in itself and separable from others; it is an indivisible ontic unit (in its own field) different from others precisely because of its singularity. The traditional image of atoms is perhaps the best example. A person, in contrast, is a center of relationships based in the qualitative distinction of uniqueness. A person is unique and incomparable, and so in some way a mystery, for uniqueness is the phenomenological expression of any ontological mystery; it cannot be compared, there is no point of reference, it remains a mystery.

In the karmic view of reality, the human being can in no way be considered a single individual—there is nothing in him that could be isolated or considered separable from the rest. All the elements of which the human being is said to consist are constitutively related to others and depend on such relations: physical elements, body, mind, will, the psychic reality of ego consciousness—it is all nothing but a bundle of relations.

In such a view, can the human being be considered a person? In other words, is there any place for the ontological uniqueness of the human being as person?<sup>51</sup>

To be sure, the answer depends on the meaning we give to "person." If we say "person" but mean "individual," then it definitely has no place here. If *ego* means individual consciousness

<sup>50</sup> YSB II.13, where individuals are said to be like knots in a fisher's net.

<sup>51</sup> See R. Panikkar, "Singularity and Individuality: The Double Principle of Individuation," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 29, no. 111–12 (1975): 141–66.

and the conviction that I myself am a kind of monad or spiritual atom (that is, something with unique ontological reality in this world), then we shall have to say there is no place for the *ego* in the karmic conception of the world. More accurately, we shall have to say that the whole karmic dynamism tends to treat this illusion of ego-ness as the main evil, both ontological and moral, and tries to eliminate it.

If by "person" we understand the incidence of a nonkarmic factor upon the karmic structure of reality that makes a particular crossing of *karman* a center of freedom and decision, then we can say there is place for the person as an incidence of a superior order, which cannot be confused with the karmic one. The only condition a karmic vision of reality would make is that the person should respect the rules of the karmic game, which are the rules of the entire cosmic order.<sup>32</sup>

From this perspective I would offer the following definition of *person*: The person is that point of convergence of *karman* that has the power (*puruṣakāra*) to burn *karman*. The person is the one reality that has power over the whole karmic structure of the universe and that is capable of directing the karmic threads in one direction or another. To use a more congenial metaphor, the person is that power that has the capacity to destroy *karman* or to engross it. The person is the great *māyīn*, the cosmic artist or magician able to create or annihilate *karman*. In a word, the person is the center of freedom. How could he modify and steer *karman* if there were not a superkarmic agent?

Anybody versed in Indic philosophy will recognize here the echoes and the quintessence of one of the underlying motives of most Indic systems: the play between *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, the intercourse between *brahman* and *Īśvara* in and through *māyā*. And here also the last and most important of all the *mahāvākyāni* acquires its liberating meaning: *tat tvam asi*. "That thou art," that is, this (you) are: *thou*, a thou of *brahman* and thus above *karman* because *thou* cannot handle *karman*.<sup>33</sup>

From this point of view, a non-egocentric understanding of karmic human existence would stress, among others, the following points.

"My" *ego* is not the owner of "my" life. This life does not begin with me, but was given to "me." I found it; I met it at a certain point endowed with positive and negative values. Or, rather, it found me. It is up to me to pass it on increased and embellished, or diminished and damaged. A series of elements, of karmic lines, have crossed and are constantly crossing within me, and I have to manage this truly human condition to the best of my abilities for my personal enjoyment and that of the whole world, without a sense of tragedy, however, for nothing on this level is ultimate and absolute. This allows non-attachment and perspective, love and play; gives a sense of relativity to all joys; and softens the cruel face of all sorrows. My *ego* does not take itself too seriously or too tragically, as if it were the center of the universe or an absolute value. At the same time, I feel a cosmic responsibility because the entire universe depends on the positive handling of the *karman* at my disposal. I am the connecting link between the past and future, between myself and others, and this on a cosmic and universal level from which not a single being is excluded. It is obvious that the motivation for doing, for work, and for good actions will have to be something more than a crude or even reformed and refined eudemonism for enjoying myself on any level. I shall act ethically only when the motives for my actions have reached an egoless motivation that is rooted in maintaining the whole universe: *lokasaṅgraha*.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See the behavior of a *jivanmukta*, a realized soul, who has transcended time and space and yet still lives among mortals.

<sup>33</sup> See *CU VI.8.7*.

<sup>34</sup> See *BG III.20*; etc.

As for "me," I shall find my enjoyment in having been called to play my role in the drama of this cosmos. As for "me," I shall be given the opportunity to discover the vertical meaning of existence, to transcend the spatiotemporal structure of reality and overcome *karman* altogether. There is no frustration for the realized person, for his or her success is not measured by an objective yardstick that gauges objective achievement, but rather by living in such a way that, while giving life away, living it out, he or she reaches the other shore, the shore of fullness—or nothingness.

At this point I shall endeavor to clarify a widely held and harmful misunderstanding and also to explain why it became so popular. I am referring to the incorrect identification of the theory of *karman* with so-called reincarnation.

If there is something the law of *karman* does not say and that in fact contradicts all that it stands for, it is this popular misinterpretation. The law of *karman* insists that all a man is—his energies, thoughts, merits and vices, his corporal elements, all that he had or was able to handle during his life—that all the *karman*, in a word, are not lost; rather they enter into the cosmic net of causality and solidarity. The exception is the psychological *ego*, which is either an illusion with no consistency whatsoever or a mere pragmatic label or a totally mortal thing, for it is the conglomerate of those qualities that fall asunder at the death of a particular human being. What transmigrates is all but the individual—if transmigration is to have any meaning at all.

The popular belief springs from an inability to get rid of what the whole karmic conception of the world intends to eradicate: selfish egocentricity. It may also be said to originate when individual consciousness emerges without a corresponding change in the cosmological worldview; then the mythical becomes mythological, at least in the eyes of those who try to interpret the beliefs of others.

May I be allowed to be anecdotal for one paragraph? I have witnessed more than once a simple Indian peasant, believing in the law of *karman*, being driven to say what he does not, in fact, believe because of the exigencies of dialogue and the limitations of his own vocabulary when faced with an "enlightened" questioner. Certainly he feels that he bears a treasure greater than himself; he is convinced that what he has in his hands, his life, is something over which he has no property rights. He senses that his existence did not begin with him nor will it end with him. But he is not saying, much less meaning, that *he* will be reborn, that *his* personality comes from someplace else and goes to another. He does not have the impression that what a modern would call the "individual" goes on transmigrating. He is much closer to the already quoted saying of Saṅkara that the Lord is the only transmigrator, that Life is what goes on, and that all the qualities he has cultivated will not be lost, nor will the vices he has accumulated. It is only when confronted with the idea that it might be *he* himself who will survive that his eyes may kindle at the temptation and he may yield, saying it may be so.

I might offer yet another hypothesis for what it is worth. Individual consciousness has for the last few centuries been so deeply rooted in the occidental mentality that Western Man can hardly imagine another type of thinking. We are now perhaps witnessing in the West a sharp reaction to this, but whatever the present trend, the fact is that the encounter between Western and Asian minds these last centuries was so entangled in the myth of the reality of the individual that no dialogue was possible without presupposing this view, indeed, taking it for granted. In this way, words like the *transmigration of souls*, *reincarnation*, and so on, came into existence and with them a deformation of the original meaning of the Asian doctrines.

All this said, it must be added that this process of individualization is not only a Western phenomenon but seems inherent to the development of human consciousness.

### *Karman and Historicity*

All that follows should be understood within the limits of a *formal* philosophical investigation, not a *material* one. I am attempting to speak a language that will make sense for the follower of more than one philosophical tradition—a risky task, perhaps, but necessary if one is to do justice to a cross-cultural investigation.

### *Karman and Time*

The karmic conception of reality relativizes time and turns it into the very expression of the law of *karman*. This is the law of the temporal flux. The degree of reality time has corresponds to the degree of reality *karman* has. For those who consider *karman* real, time is real; for those for whom *karman* is unreal or partly so, time suffers the same fate. In fact, time is nothing but the flow of *karman*. *Karman* is a kind of condensation of time. Time past means past *karman*, and future time means *karman* to come.

The so-called circular time is nothing but a transference of the beginninglessness of the karmic world to the sphere of time. Time is supposed to be circular simply because *karman* is considered to be inexhaustible without being absolute. To transcend *karman*, to burn it, to extinguish all *karman*, means to escape time, to go beyond it and enter the timeless. Now the beginninglessness of *karman* has quite often been misunderstood and construed as an ontological theory, when the original intuition was only phenomenological. *Karman* has no beginning and no end because it is not an entity in itself nor has it an end in itself. The only beginning of *karman* is the beginning that is taking place every moment; the only end (aim, goal) of *karman* is the end (extinction) of it. But to affirm that all *karmans* will one day disappear is a sentence that has no meaning within the karmic context in which alone it can be formulated.<sup>55</sup>

Both time and *karman* allow for formal treatment, that is, for a consideration of their nature independent of temporal things or the things themselves. Yet this is only a thinking abstraction because in the last analysis there cannot be time without things temporal, just as there can be no *karman* without the actions and the results of different agents. Both *karman* and time are indissolubly tied to the things themselves.

### *Karman and History*

The law of *karman* expresses what modern Western language might call the historical dynamism of beings. It is clear that if the center of gravity resides in and the attention of history is directed toward events easily datable externally, the law of *karman* does not pay them much attention. What the law of *karman* describes and registers are the inner modifications, the happenings internal to the beings themselves; karmic law centers its attention not on what beings did, but on what happened to them as they did it.

We may define *historicity* as the capacity to accumulate the past, as it were, and assume it into the present, or as that quality of human existence by which the past emerges into the present and configures it. This is not by a simple process of remembrance or by a gathering up of physical or spiritual bits and pieces of the past, but by assimilating or integrating them into

<sup>55</sup> See R. Panikkar, "Temps et histoire dans la tradition de l'Inde," in *Les cultures et le temps* (Paris: Payot/UNESCO, 1975), 73–101; and "El presente tempiterno," in *Teología y mundo contemporáneo*, ed. A. Vargas-Machuca (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1975), 100–178, which relieves us here from being more explicit.

the present in a special way. Again, if we define this same concept as that peculiar character by which the future too, somewhat similarly, becomes active and present in hope and reality in the here and now—so that one cannot define a person without including his past and future—then we may say that all those human peculiarities that today we sum up under the name of "historicity" are practically all present and effective in the conception of *karman*.

*Karman* is the crystallization of actions past, as well as of the results of acts that are no longer in the past, but that emerge and are present in the contemporary situation of whoever bears that particular *karman*. In a way I am as much what I "was" and equally what I "shall be" as what at present I "am." Both past and future are already present in my present real situation.

We could use the familiar distinction between having and being. Properly speaking, *karman* is not what I *am*, but what I *have*. What I *am* belongs to the mystery of the person, and ultimately one can only say "I *am*" (*aham asmi*). What I *have* is my *karman*, and with it I have to deal with my earthly existence. But if we overlook that "I" for which the "am" is ultimately meaningful, then all actions of the human being, including psychological consciousness, "are" its *karman*: a condensation of acts past, a dynamism of tendencies to be realized in the future: all that composes the present.

In this sense a great part of Indic philosophy could be considered a philosophy of history—not a philosophical reflection on external events, but a philosophical meditation on the historicity of being, on the peculiar temporal character of the human being and all cosmos, which is so configured that nothing is lost. Everything accumulates and emerges in a present that condenses all past actions and realities. And this to such an extent that to consider a being as only what it is now, neglecting what it was and ignoring what it shall be, could be called a philosophical sin.

This awareness of historicity in the karmic sense is built into the Asian mentality. It is almost taken for granted that I am a condensed result of the past, that all I *have* is simply *karman* (historicity), that there is no original newness, no genuine beginning, that revolutions are childish, politically speaking, if it is supposed that they can begin with a *tabula rasa*.

The traditional concept of *avatāra* or descent of the divine is intimately connected with the theory of *karman*. And this gives to the *avatāra* what Christian theology would term its docetic character. The *avatāra* is justified precisely because cosmic history shows experientially a kind of negative inertia: by itself, the world tends to go downhill and requires again and again the intervention of the divine, of the nonkarmic order, to reverse the trend. So we have an option between two fundamental views of historicity: history as a declining process or as an uphill path. Indic thought tends to accept the idea of a redeeming power that saves the karmic world from getting more and more involved in such a density of relations that it would bring about a kind of ontic asphyxia.

### Karman and Man

I am reading from, rather than into, Indic Scripture and tradition when I assert that the theory of *karman* does two things:

It elevates the entire world to the human sphere and abolishes human privileges, putting Man on a level with the rest of the universe. In other words, there is a universal law that governs both Man and the World without distinction. The karmic structure is common to all beings. Some see this as degrading Man to the level of a mere thing. Others may prefer to say it entails enhancing the whole contingent world up to the level of human dignity.

One thing is certain: the entire realm of being is under one and the same law, and this law is temporal, or rather historical. It is this law of *karman* that says that the structure of

reality is such that it allows mutual interactions in space and, especially, in time, though differently from that described by Newton's physical laws of action and reaction. This law, by contrast, is built on the pattern of reality itself. Being is karmic; being is temporal and historical. Being has a dimension to which the separation in space (which makes individuals) or in time (which makes things and multiplicity) is no longer sufficient or valid. An isolated being is an abstraction, an artificial and antinatural separation from the existing and given reality. All is stitched together in the warp and woof of *karman*.

The law of *karman* gives expression to the fundamental human condition, yet at the same time allows us to overcome it, not by postulating a "better" idealized human condition, but by transcending it altogether. Man is more than "Man," but as long as he is "Man," not only must he play the human game, but there is no escaping his human condition. He will cease to be "Man" and this just may be his hope: not to prolong his human conditionings indefinitely, but to abandon them totally and without regret. Even in Man's earthly life he has glimpsed that other shore that allows him to pierce through space and time and, abandoning all human values, reach that Life that is neither separable nor distinguishable from his everyday karmic existence. Only an irresistible joy bubbles up. The end of "Man" is Man, but when that end is reached, Man ceases to be "Man," and this is salvation: neither a jump outside history nor its negation, but the realization that "Man" is history, and that history, like "Man," is only for the time being.

## THE DROP OF WATER

*AN INTERCULTURAL METAPHOR*

*Just as rivers flowing to the ocean  
 merge in it, losing name and form,  
 so the wise man, freed from name and form,  
 attains the supreme, divine Person.*

*MundU III.2.8<sup>1</sup>*

*Nuestras vidas son los ríos  
 que van a dar en la mar  
 que es el morir,  
 allí van los señoríos  
 prestos a se acabar  
 y consumir.*

*Jorge Manrique Coplas*

According to the *Vedas*, the Bible, and other sacred texts, water (the primordial element par excellence) precedes creation.<sup>2</sup> The myths of Babylon, Persia, and India describe the primordial waters, and parallels can be found among the most widely divergent cultures, from Greece to Africa.<sup>3</sup> Like life itself, water lies at the source of everything.<sup>4</sup> "Living waters," "a

Original edition, "The Drop of Water: An Intercultural Metaphor," in *Samarasya. Studies in Indian Arts, Philosophy and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. S. Das and E. Fürlinger (Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2005); elaboration of an old text "L'eau et la mort," in *Archivio di Filosofia* (Istituto di studi filosofici; Rome) (1981).

<sup>1</sup> *yathā nandyāḥ syandamānāḥ samudrēśtarī gacchanti nāmarūpe vibhāya I  
 tathā vidvānnāmarūpādvimuktah parātparāṇi puruṣam upaiti divyam II.*

See also *KathU* IV.14–15; *BS* I.4.21; and also my commentaries in *The Vedic Experience*, new ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsi das, 2001), 700–704.

<sup>2</sup> See Gen 1:2; *SB* IX.1.6.1 (*āpo ba vā idam agre*).

<sup>3</sup> See M. Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions* (Paris: Payot, 1970), §§ 60–61, and his bibliography on the subject, 184–87; Ph. Rech: *Inbild des Kosmos* (Salzburg: O. Müller, 1966).

<sup>4</sup> See F. Baartmans, Āpah, *The Sacred Waters: An Analysis of a Primordial Symbol in Hindu Myths* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Co., 1990).

spring of water welling up," and "rivers of living water" are commonly found expressions in traditions all over the world.<sup>5</sup>

Water symbolizes life. Unlike individual plants or animals or human beings, water does not die. Water is one. Water moves and transforms as one water. The sea has the *stasis* of a fixed place and the *dynamis* of constant and seemingly immanent movement, at once always the same and ever-changing. Water is alive, it is the very source of life.<sup>6</sup> "Once upon a time," Ploutarchos tells us, "Man was without fire, but he was never without water."<sup>7</sup> In places where water is scarce or even nonexistent, its absence renders the surrounding land barren, a "land of death."<sup>8</sup>

Numerous traditions attribute to water the power of purification and regeneration: one is born again into a new and higher life through the waters of baptism or of *abhiṣeka*. Water is necessary for purifying oneself<sup>9</sup>—before entering the temple, the mosque, and so on.

Water, however, also possesses the power to drown, dissolve, and destroy. We need only mention the almost universal myth of the flood, or point to the common experiences of farmers and sailors throughout the ages to illustrate this more perilous feature of water. Yet we should not hastily label this a paradox, and make the facile claim that the very source of life is also the cause of death. Life that is mortal is not "pure" life, but is rather the life of beings whose capacity for life is limited. Death comes from being fragmented.<sup>10</sup> Our reflection on water and death pivots around this central point: death is a *constituent* element of life inasmuch as death is found in and among living beings, but death is not a *constitutive* attribute of life.<sup>11</sup>

Is life *qua* life mortal? There are two logical answers. If life is not primordial (if, for instance, life is the result of chemical development and biological evolution), then it is not inherently immortal. Life would then either be sheer chance, or an achievement that must be conquered again and again. This idea does not need to be exclusively tied to the theory of evolution; this is the function of sacrifice in the *Veda*, for example.

If, on the other hand, life is primordial (if life is the very principle of reality), then it is immortal by nature. This is a point of profound disagreement between those who believe in an absolute theory of evolution and those who believe in a living God. In the first case, life is the product or by-product of reality, whereas in the second, life is the very center of reality.

<sup>5</sup> See Jn 4:10–11; 7:37; *SB* IV.4.3.15 (water is the elixir of immortality); etc.

<sup>6</sup> In classical Greece, cadavers were called *alibantes*, those who have "dried out," those who have lost their water, their sap. See Plato, *The Republic* III.387c, although modern etymology questions the accuracy of the classical interpretation of *alibos*. See H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: K. Winter, 1954), sub voce. Some have thought, rather, of *oligos* with its connotation of frailty and impotence.

<sup>7</sup> *Questioni conviviali* (2p 956a). The preceding text also refers to the dead as "without sap": "Water is useful in summer and winter, in health and illness, by day and at night. There is no situation in which we do not need it. For this reason, the dead are called *alibantes*, that is those who are no longer 'moist,' hence who are no longer alive."

<sup>8</sup> The Rajasthan desert in India is called *nuarubbhumi*, i.e., the wild uncultivated land (*bhumi*), the land of death (*maru*—probably from the root *mri*, to die). The desert is described as *nirjana* (without living beings or without life) and *nirjala* (without water).

<sup>9</sup> See *RV* X.9.8.

<sup>10</sup> We are reminded of Plato's arguments favoring the immortality of the soul by reason of its simplicity.

<sup>11</sup> "Mejor que decir que los seres orgánicos mueren esencial y necesariamente, es sostener que se van constituyendo como seres mortales. La mortalidad, en suma, no es en ellos una propiedad constitutiva sino constituyente" (J. Ferrater Mora, *El ser y la muerte. bosquejo de filosofía integracionista* [Madrid: Aguilar, 1962], 154).

Echoing Aristotle, St. Thomas said, "Vita viventibus est esse" (The life of living beings is their being). Now, this being is not static, but is rather a becoming, a "not-yet-being," since it is on the way to being—to be. Hence, this being is on the way to life, which is a risky process that can fail.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, the problem is whether "in the beginning" (*in principio, en archē, ager*) there was life and being or whether there was death and non-being.<sup>13</sup> Is life an epiphenomenon, or does life form the deepest core of reality? Can Man dare claim an immortality of a higher order than that of the sun, which has already "lived out" most of its life, or than that of the stars, which are "mortal" bodies whirling in sidereal space?<sup>14</sup> It is a disservice to feminism to yield to the mainly dialectic thinking of the males. How are we to understand expressions from many traditions that speak of the "Lord of life,"<sup>15</sup> the "Source of Being,"<sup>16</sup> the Father of him who is Life?<sup>17</sup> Do they mean that life is the most important product of reality, its "firstborn," its primary manifestation, but not perhaps, its ultimate mystery?

Putting these questions aside, let us try to understand how water, the symbol of life, can also bring about death. Supposing that a living being were given "more" life than the life that is proper to it, this "excess life" would, as it were, suffocate that creature's life. New life entails new being.<sup>18</sup> In this vein, the Abrahamic traditions contend that no one can see God—who is, by definition, pure life. Likewise, Indic wisdom emphasizes that pure life requires pure being. Sunlight illuminates, but the glare of the sun can blind by excess of light just as much as darkness can by lack of light.

Water, the symbol of life, can also be the symbol of death, but in a different way. In and of itself, water *is* living and *is* the source of life, but it can also *bring* death. There exists a thin thread linking life and death—although strictly speaking, this link is not one of necessity. Let us reflect on the nature of this thread.

First of all, we must distinguish between death and nonlife. We can experience death, but we cannot experience nonlife. Nonlife is a *concept* and exists only in a dialectical relationship with the *concept* of life. They are contradictories. Death, on the other hand, is not simply nonlife or the inanimate. To be sure, we could define *death* as *nonlife*, or vice versa, and this operation would be irrefutably logical, but it would not necessarily reflect reality. We might remark in passing that some religious philosophies see in the fact that we can

<sup>12</sup> See R. Panikkar, *El concepto de naturaleza. Análisis histórico y metafísico de un concepto*, 2nd ed. (1951), 283–95, as well as the chapter, "Life in vitro" in my *Ontonomía de la ciencia* (Madrid: Gredos, 1961), 179–93.

<sup>13</sup> See the Indic texts: "At first was neither being nor nonbeing" (*RVX*.129.1); "In the beginning there was nothing here whatsoever. All this was swathed in Death—in hunger, for hunger indeed is death" (*BU*.1.2.1); etc.

<sup>14</sup> English language does not explicitly distinguish between gender and sex. Using this language as the modern *koine*, the author does not subscribe to the North American modern usage and, conscious of the etymology of the words, gives not males the privilege of being Man, nor degrades females to the status of women. The masculine gender does not refer exclusively to males.

<sup>15</sup> See *AVX*.7.7 and also the conclusion in X.7.41.

<sup>16</sup> See my trinitarian interpretation in R. Panikkar, *Trinität, Über das Zentrum menschlicher Erfahrung* (München: Kösel, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> See the affirmations of Christ as Life (Jn 6:35–40; 10:28; 11:25–26; 14:6) and God as his Father (Jn 5:18; 10:30; 16:28).

<sup>18</sup> From this perspective, one could say that the Christian resurrection presupposes that Man already participates in a higher (divine) life; otherwise the resurrected one would not be the same person. Similarly, Hindū *karma* implies a continuity of life deeper than that normally experienced by an individual.

think about death and life without totally experiencing either one is both an opening of the human being toward an ontological transcendence that goes beyond Man and an affirmation of human contingency.

Human life is often accompanied by certain experiences of death. When a loved one dies, it is as if part of our self has died. We also experience the death of *love*—ideals, goals, and ideas that were previously part of our life. We justifiably speak of death as a personal and familiar experience. According to pure logic, although one cannot properly say, "I die," because there is no "I" to say it, one may think that the "I" dies. In short, certain experiences of death belong to us inasmuch as we are living beings. Our experience of life is impregnated with experiences of death.

Death occurs as a rupturing of life, as a point of discontinuity inexplicable in itself, but never simply as nonlife. If a being is alive at moment *A*, it is difficult to see why it should not be alive at moment *B* unless some external element intervenes. This is the same law of inertia already formulated by Plato. Death requires a death-causing agent. Life does not die of itself, yet there is the universal human observation that conscious life also appears to include the consciousness of mortality. While death is certainly an *existential* partner of life, it is not necessarily an *essential* dimension of life.

Man has also conceived of a pure life, a life without death. Indeed, some experiences of life contain no reference to death. There are experiences of the present, the "now." As such, they have no durational dimension. Yet we continue to live in time and cannot believe in an open-ended duration in time, since we see that our fellow creatures die.

We can think about life and death, and in certain circumstances we can experience life without the intrusion of death. We can also experience death—not an absolute death, but rather, so to speak, a death tied to a life stronger than death. Nevertheless, the problem remains: Can we experience a pure and absolute life while continuing to experience our being in time?

Further, although we can certainly *think* about nonlife, we cannot *experience* it. The relation between life and death is not reducible to the relation between life and nonlife, because in the final analysis, *the ultimate structure of reality is not necessarily dialectical*. We can say that nonlife is the contradiction of life, whereas death is the opposite of life. Equating these two very different relations has, in my opinion, given rise to more than one misunderstanding. Nonlife has nothing to do with death. Death, on the other hand, is related to life; it is its enemy. Nonlife cannot touch life, but death deeply wounds life.

Can we find a parallel between the life-death relation and personal relationships? Are personal relationships constitutive or are they merely relations *de facto*, that is, constituent and not constitutional relations? First of all, we can say that both of these relationships are dialogical relations and not simply dialectical ones. The "I" of a person is opposed not only to a "non-I" (as in a dialectical relation) but more importantly to a "thou" (as in a dialogical relation). The "thou" is neither "I" nor "non-I."<sup>19</sup> This "thou" is the "thou" of the "I." The "thou" exists in response to the "I," and the "I" is "I" only for a "thou." Neither exists without the other. Similarly, life is opposed not only by nonlife, but also by death, which is neither life nor nonlife. Life, which contradicts nonlife, does not contradict death because life and death are related in a dialogical polarity. In a certain way, life seems to imply death.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The *proton pseudos* of German idealism, as well as all so-called modern thought (i.e., post-Descartes), bases its philosophical method on the dialectical opposition between the *Ich* and the *Nicht-Ich*, while neglecting the *Ich-Du* polarity, which Feuerbach had earlier explored and that was later developed by M. Buber, F. Rosenzweig, F. Ebner, and others.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, the "I die every day" of 1 Cor 15:31 and the once-famous medieval chant, *Media vita in morte sumus*.

Here again we face two great avenues in the history of human thought: the monist or absolute monotheistic option and the a-dualistic or trinitarian option. The first great option, monism or rigid monotheism, declares that there can be an "I" without a "thou" and there can be life without death. In effect, monism says that reality is one, and that the "thou" and death are mere appearance. Monotheism says that, de facto, a divine act has called both the "thou" and death into being,<sup>21</sup> but this entails an act of divine grace that is neither de jure nor by necessity.

The second great option<sup>22</sup> tends to support the parallel we have drawn. A-dualism, or the trinitarian insight, claims that such a distinction (whether de facto or de jure) makes no sense in the realm of the ultimate. In this perspective, there is no "I" without a "thou," nor any "thou" without an "I." Similarly, the relationship between life and death is constitutive because the relationship is a constituting one, even if the present-day modality of human death may change. If in the final analysis the life-death relationship is constitutive, life is a constant resurrection (from death). A-dualism would say that the relation of the "thou" to the "I," like that of death and life, is real. The trinitarian idea would maintain that there is a complete interpenetration (*a circumcessio* or *perichoresis*) between the "I" and the "thou" and that this relationship is sustained by death and resurrection.<sup>23</sup>

These two views of the life-death relationship raise another question: Is the fact that death is constantly "mixed" with life an accidental or natural phenomenon? As we have said, many traditions do not consider death a natural occurrence. Moreover, it is precisely pure life, one having no relation with death, that more than one religion calls *God*. From this perspective, theism would affirm the existence of life without death. Yet we do not intend to analyze the immortality of God or the Gods here. Rather, we are focused solely on the possible immortality of Man.

Have we not made a virtue of necessity, and deduced that human life must be mortal from the fact that death is inseparable from life?<sup>24</sup> Have not the traditional religions (except perhaps in their mystical expressions) been too hasty in relegating *real* life to *another* life, a life beyond death? Has not modern Man, in the East as well as in the West, continued this process by demythologizing the myth of a theological cosmology, in which the entire universe is sacred, only to substitute in its place the new myth of history, in which true life is projected into the future? Has not history been turned into cosmology so that the Western brand of modern anthropology might be inserted? Man no longer attains immortality in a cosmological setting (a different existence, whether in this world or in another one), but by virtue of his anthropological destiny (through fame and through a person's enduring influence on his society).<sup>25</sup>

These far-ranging considerations may serve as an introduction to our reflections on the metaphor of the drop of water, for they warn us of the danger of making monocultural assumptions when it comes to questions of human destiny. We cannot simply move from

<sup>21</sup> Or as many Vedic texts say: In the beginning the I was alone, but the price of this solitude was ennui. The I was without joy, and the desire for a second arose in him (see *SB* II.4.1; *BU* I.4.1–3; *AU* I.1.1).

<sup>22</sup> Since we are limiting our comparisons in this study, we must exclude the dualist (pluralist) or polytheist option, which would defend the plurality and independence of every "I" and "thou."

<sup>23</sup> This would hold true in the intra-trinitarian realm as well as in a space-time economy. In Christianity, this is the place of the mystery of the Christ.

<sup>24</sup> Today we speak of *athanatology* as the study of human immortality.

<sup>25</sup> Significantly, the official ideology of communist countries uses history as the "orthodox" expression of immortality. For example, one reads and hears everywhere expressions such as "A Hero of the People is Immortal."

cosmology to cosmology, taking what we want from one and mixing it with another, while ignoring the less appealing or even contradictory aspects of both. This is true regarding both different cultures and the same culture at different stages of development. We must take into account, for instance, that heaven and hell no longer exist for a part of humanity, and that while Newtonian space has lost its metaphysical weight, historical time still retains its cosmological power. We return to this point after we have analyzed a metaphor that straddles both space and time.

We are not planning to discuss the entire problematic on death, nor are we claiming that our metaphor is the "best" for understanding the problem of human destiny. We are primarily trying to give a hermeneutic for this metaphor in such a way that does justice to those cultures and subcultures that use it. The study of any human problem includes not only what we think, but also what others think. Therefore, a valid discourse on death today cannot be an individual reflection, but must also contain what our ancestors have thought and felt when confronted with death. Death is not a pure, objectifiable "fact," for death includes all the perceptions that peoples—our forebears, our contemporaries, our children—have of death. Death "is" what I think it is as well as what others think or have thought or will think it is. If these diverse experiences are foreign to us, they nevertheless belong to the very nature of death. The strength of our metaphor lies precisely in its relative universality. Because people of quite different cultures use this metaphor, it can reveal how death is seen and felt by them. Perhaps a hermeneutics of this metaphor will help to overcome a certain anxiety concerning death without, however, removing its mystery.

The destiny of the human individual has often been compared to the fate of a drop of water in the ocean.<sup>26</sup> What happens when a person dies? What happens when a drop of water falls into the sea? To be sure, the questions of mortality and immortality are meaningful only within a framework of our consciousness of human individuality. The living individual is mortal, not life. It is the same for a drop of water: the ocean does not die, but the drops of water that have fallen into the ocean disappear. In short, the individual, human or drop, dies. Death is a (primarily anthropological) problem that exists only for an individual. This is not to say, however, that our approach should be exclusively anthropological, or that we should ignore cosmology or theology. By so limiting our perspective, we would effectively cut ourselves off from a genuine understanding of other cultures. Nor are we suggesting that philosophical (read: cosmological) reflection about death has no place in religions or cultures that do not hypostasize consciousness in individuals.<sup>27</sup> What happens to the human "drop

<sup>26</sup> Gampopa, the celebrated Tibetan monk of the twelfth century and the onetime disciple of Milarepa, composed *The Jewel-Ornament of Liberation*. This text later became the manual of the Kagü-pa, which he organized. His work is an almost complete collection of all the Buddhist sources. One text begins: "In the *Phags pa blo gros mizad.pti*" mdo (*Akṣakamatipariprachasūtra*) we read: "Sāriputra, just as a single drop of water that falls into the vast ocean is not lost nor absorbed by the ocean until the end of time, so too the precepts concerning what is good and salutary that have transformed into illumination will never be exhausted until one becomes the quintessence of the awakening." Trans. H. V. Guenther, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (1959; Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1971), XII.160.

<sup>27</sup> At the end of his chapter, "La mort cosmique Brahman et Nirvana," E. Morin writes, "Le refus de l'individualité refus impossible dans la vie même et qui n'a plus de sens dans la mort, est à proprement parler l'escamotage du problème de la mort" (*L'homme et la morte* [Paris: Seuil, 1970], 262). Obviously, the denial of individuality presupposes its prior existence. But it is one thing to deny individuality and quite another not to presuppose its existence as the only possible form of consciousness. A third attitude might consist of affirming the possibility of going beyond individual death.

of water" when it meets the infinite ocean of Brahmā, Dharmadhātu,<sup>28</sup> God, Nothingness, *nirvāṇa*, time, or whatever name we give to the Ocean? What happens to Man when he dies?

By putting the question in this way, we first accept that death is inevitable, and second, confine ourselves to explaining this fact without worrying whether or not death is constitutive to Man.<sup>29</sup> The radical question—"to be or not to be," as the *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* poses it<sup>30</sup>—arises only when death confronts the individual as the problem of his own non-being. The question is: (my) being or (my) nothingness.

Various religious traditions have responded differently. Most modern interpretations of the Abrahamic traditions<sup>31</sup> place a great deal of importance on the individual, while the majority of Eastern religions are primarily interested in the totality.<sup>32</sup> In an ironic twist of fate, the question of individual immortality in the *Kaṭha-upaniṣad*<sup>33</sup> was posed at a time that probably predates Plato. Of course, we are well aware that while the Indic answer does not negate the *ātman* (individual), it does counsel the recognition of one's identity with *Brahman*: *ātman brahma*.<sup>34</sup> Buddhism offers a completely different answer: there is no *ātman*.<sup>35</sup> Even more: Man's mistaken preoccupation with the *ātman* is the obstacle to real immortality (and *nirvāṇa*).<sup>36</sup>

Let us return to the drop of water. What happens when it falls into the sea? What happens to Man when he dies? Does he retain anything of his own or is he completely absorbed by the Ocean of Being (or God or Nothingness)? Non-being is not. Can we not say the same about death? Death certainly is, but what is its ontological status? The *Vedic* tradition, as

<sup>28</sup> See Gampopa, op. cit., ch. XVII.224.

<sup>29</sup> See Igor A. Caruso, *Die Trennung der Liebenden* (Bern/Stuttgart: Hans Huber, 1968), which offers a utopia made possible by going beyond death ("Aufhebung des Todes," p. 309), in a new modality of existing.

<sup>30</sup> *asti nāsti* [he is or he is not], *KaṭhU* I.20.

<sup>31</sup> I use this expression to denote not only the three great monotheistic religions but also humanism and Western-style Marxism.

<sup>32</sup> "Entre l'univers! mythique (*Nirvāṇa*) et l'individual mythique (*Salut*), l'humanité choisit en masse le salut" (E. Morin, op. cit., 260). There is, on the other hand, the striking fact that in practice every worldview pays more attention to the less developed aspects of its vision, while it takes other aspects for granted. For instance, the Abrahamic religions, which generally consider Man as *drop*, and hence presuppose human individuality as their point of departure, also emphasize collective salvation (of the people of Israel, of the church, of the ummah), while the Indic religions, which tend to identify Man with the *water*, also emphasize the complementary aspect of salvation as fundamentally individual: Man depends on his *karma*, he must rely on himself, he achieves his own liberation, etc. Likewise, we are aware of the widespread phenomenon that most prophets, regardless of their religion, tend to preach and emphasize precisely those aspects complementary to their own worldview: to individualistic people, they preach a common destiny; to aggressive people, nonviolence; to traditions that have institutionalized injustice, justice; and so forth.

<sup>33</sup> See *The Vedic Experience*, op. cit., 563–71, where the situation of young Naciketas in the *KaṭhU* points toward a personalist solution, one that Yama, the God of death, later raises to an ontological level.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 704–45. On the other hand, an identity between Man and Yahweh would be meaningless or sheer blasphemy.

<sup>35</sup> See, however, the study of K. Bhattacharya, *L'ātman-brahman dans le Bouddhisme ancien* (Paris, 1973), which attempts to show that, in the beginning, Buddhism did not deny the real *ātman*, i.e., the *Upaniṣadic* *ātman*.

<sup>36</sup> See H. v. Glaserapp, *Immortality and Salvation in Indian Religions* (Calcutta: Susil Gupta, 1963), v.

well as many others, would reply that death kills only what can be killed. If this is so, then death cannot kill "what" we truly are. On the contrary, death discloses our true state. For this reason, the "death" of an individual who has not burned all of her *karma* is only an intermediate state, because a person's real death frees her completely from *samsāra* (the cycle of existences). Similarly, we distinguish between death as the splashing of the human drop into the ocean "full of its lifespan" (*dirgha-āyus*) and an accidental, premature death (*akala-mṛtyu*), which prevents growth and maturity.<sup>37</sup> The former implies the disappearance of the membrane surrounding the drop, while the latter evokes a more or less complete and unexpected evaporation of the water. Death as *dirgha-āyus* reveals the *Brahman* or *nirvāṇa* that we are: it preserves everything that Man fundamentally is: be that Soul, Nothingness, God, Being.... This does not die: *tat twam asi*.<sup>38</sup> You are that which death has finally unveiled. Let us see what happens when a human drop of water dies, when it "loses itself" in the sea.

*Our answer depends on what we are: the drop of water or the water of the drop.* What represents a human being: The drop or the water? What constitutes Man: his "drop" or his "water"? Is Man the quantitative difference between drops or the qualitative difference between waters?<sup>39</sup>

When the *drop* falls into the ocean, the surface tension that separates it from every other drop, the barrier that prevents total, profound communication and genuine communion certainly disappears. The drop no longer exists as drop. After falling into the ocean, this tiny separate drop of water, together with the time and space that individualized it, are no more. So too at death the individuality of Man is absorbed into *Brahman* or returns to its cosmic matrix or melts into God or is united with Him. The individual is annihilated; it ceases to exist; it is transformed into what it was (or was called to be) and so on. If Man is the drop, and if this drop falls into the sea, then this individual is truly dead. Death is ontological (obviously in terms of the being of the *drop*).

The *water* of the drop, however, does not suffer the same fate. It continues to be; it has lost nothing; it has not ceased to be what it was. The water of this drop is now in communion with the water of the entire ocean without having lost anything. Granted, it may have undergone some changes, but none of them has stripped the drop of its being as water. So too with Man, who realizes himself fully at death, who becomes what in reality he always was, although before death he was not (or did not appear to be) this real being insofar as he identified his being with his temporal past or his spatial parameters. Death breaks through the barrier of space and time, and perhaps also that of Man's limited consciousness. This

<sup>37</sup> From this perspective, death is not inevitable; it is accidental, against nature. A person dies when he is abruptly or violently cut off from life by an accident or an illness, before he has grown to maturity, begun a family, or accomplished his life's task in society. In this sense, an old man, a person who has reached the end of a long life, does not die. There is no breaking off from life, no interruption of its progress. The flame of life has finally consumed all the oil that nourished it, but continues to burn on in his children, his friends, his ideas, and his achievements; see *The Vedic Experience*, op. cit., "Death and Dissolution," 553-612.

<sup>38</sup> CU VI.8-14; 16, which permit the following extrapolation, because what the *Upaniṣad* really discloses is that we are a "thou," "That art thou." See *The Vedic Experience*, op. cit., 747-58.

<sup>39</sup> See R. Panikkar, "Singularity and Individuality: The Double Principle of Individuation," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* (Bruxelles) 29, no. 111-12 (1915): 141-66. A scientific conception of the universe favors drops that are quantitatively (i.e., measurably) different, whereas a traditional understanding of the world emphasizes the qualitative differences in the water. It is difficult to see how one could defend a qualitative difference among drops (outside of the water) or a quantitative difference in the waters (outside of the drops themselves).

change, however, cannot be so substantial or fundamental that we could speak of a mutation or of a different life. The water finds itself. Man realizes himself. *Vita mutatur, non tollitur*<sup>40</sup> Death is phenomenal (obviously in terms of the *water* of the drop).

Our question is not yet answered: Is Man the *drop* of water or the *water* of the drop?

### If Man Is Considered as a Drop . . .

If Man is considered as a drop, namely as the superficial tension separating him from everything else, as an individual, a monad, then the human being indeed disappears with the individual's death, and death becomes a great tragedy against which Man must struggle with all his might.

We can describe two ways in which Man has undertaken this struggle: the first, what have traditionally been the concern of religion; the second, what is today called *secularism*.

The religious struggle postulates a more authentic and definitive life after death: the drop disappears in order to be born again, either as a crystallized and definitive drop in one of the many versions of eternal life, or as a new drop in an entirely new temporal life. Within the category of the traditional religions, we can further distinguish two types: one accepts a space-time unity on earth and resurrects the drop afterward in some sort of eternal state. The other speaks in terms of a cosmic cycle of existence. The first posits a kind of mutation to a level that is absolutely higher than human existence. The second believes in a law of successive reincarnations, the law of *karma*. The latter type also believes that at a certain moment, which is the result of a more or less determined process, we can escape from the cycle of births and rebirths by attaining a pure transcendence similar to that sought by the first type of religion, but with a fundamental difference: in general, the former religions want to retain the "drop" (individuality) on the "other shore," while the latter for the most part consider individuality as a characteristic of *samsara*, the temporal order. Consequently, from this perspective, Man is considered to be a drop only during the span of his existence in this temporal universe. In fact, this type of religion has more in common with the attitude, described below, that considers Man to be the *water* of the drop.

The differences in these beliefs clearly show the ambivalence of every religious stance: everything depends on the belief of the believer. For example, belief in life after death can be consoling, positive, and efficacious for those who profess it, since, as they plod on through this "valley of tears," they take upon themselves responsibility for the entire universe, having in mind the better life to come. On the other hand, for those who do not believe in it, the idea of another world can be a destructive ideology and paralyze all human initiative. Or again, if the "other" life is separated from "this" life so that the former is independent from the "works" of this world, the world is abandoned to its fate—or, worse, left to those who would exploit it. In this case religion would indeed be an opiate that may perhaps assuage individual pain but in the long run perpetuates injustice.

In contrast to these answers, the so-called secular response proclaims that there is no "other" life. An individual's only hope lies in improving the human condition as much as possible here and now. That death is considered a great scandal for its existence testifies to the fact that the project "Man" has not yet been achieved. It is the one unavoidable fact that Man would like to deny and against which he must struggle in order to bring the human project one step closer to fulfillment. In fact, this secular struggle is motivated by what might properly be called a *religious impulse*, without which Man would be impotent, drugged by

<sup>40</sup> As the Latin liturgy for the dead chants, "Life changes, it does not disappear."

the opiates of egotism and non-action. In this sense, the struggle of secularism against death can be as genuinely religious as that of the "formal" religions.<sup>41</sup>

Whether we label the struggle "religious" or "secular," however, its chief concern is to save the *drop* of water, although "drop" may imply a clan or a tribe or a chosen people, rather than a single individual. The basic attitude is clear: Man's destiny lies either in another world where human "drops" are crystallized in a heavenly immortality or in this world, which is called to be transformed into paradise, although the generations who build this "perfect society" must be sacrificed: "The workers will perish but the city will be built!"<sup>42</sup>

This response to death typifies the Abrahamic cultures, or more simply, Western civilization. Man is the drop.

### If Man Is Considered as the Water of the Drop

If Man is considered to be the water of the drop, then the human person can retain her unique character after death. In a certain sense, the person is even more unique than if she were the *drop*, for each drop is itself not by virtue of accidental differences or superficial tension, nor because of spatiotemporal limitations, but because every portion of water is *other*—unique. The distinction is ontic, not epistemic. In other words, what distinguishes the drop is the water itself, not its surface tension or its situation in time or place. The *water* of each drop is identified by its identity with itself (identification by means of identity), whereas in (a) the first instance, the *drop* is identified by differentiating it from all other drops (identification by means of difference).<sup>43</sup> To say that a human being is the water, moreover, does not mean that its being encompasses *all* water, only that it is (real) inasmuch as it is water.

This belief has given rise to a great temptation, one similar to the drugging effect of religion mentioned above. It consists of a kind of monolithic monism that cripples human creativity: If my "drop" is real only as water and not equally as the water of *my* drop, what could it mean to "work out your salvation with diligence"?<sup>44</sup> To be sure, we must be careful not to confuse monism with a-dualism. Monism results when thought stifles reality; it reduces the real to a concept or an idea. A-dualism, on the other hand, maintains the two (Being and Thought) in a creative polarity: it holds that the water of each drop cannot be identified with any concept of "water." This distinction is important since the water of each drop is precisely the water of each drop, and not the water of an abstract concept of water. If we speak in conceptual terms, then the water of *my* drop must equal the concept of "water" of someone else's drop. But this conceptual interpretation does not mean that these drops are identical as real *water*; rather it refers to some kind of univocal concept of water. The quantitative formula  $H_2O$  certainly applies to water in terms of its chemical composition, but reality is also qualitative. Water is hot or cold, fresh or salty, metallic or sulfurous. Not only does each water taste different, the water of every drop actually differs from all other water as *water* (and not solely as drop). Ultimately, when we say *water*, we imply all waters

<sup>41</sup> This raises a semantic issue. Is the term *religion* limited to one particular human attitude, or is it rather a "generic" label that admits many specific differences within an overall stance toward reality? See my note "Have Religions the Monopoly on 'Religion'?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 11, no. 3 (1974): 515-17.

<sup>42</sup> Note that this slogan could be applied to every branch of Abrahamic religiosity: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Marxism, Humanism.

<sup>43</sup> See R. Panikkar, *Kultmysterium in Hinduismus und Christentum* (Freiburg: Alber, 1964), *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> According to tradition, these are the Buddha's last words.

because in reality, water cannot be labeled singular or plural, One or Many. The world is not reducible to quantity, nor for that matter is it reducible to substance.

The temptation lies in giving up our immediate apprehension of the *symbol* by substituting the *concept* of water and then declaring that the differences among the various drops of water are only accidental or sheer illusion. Since Being is supposed to be one, beings are defined as real in terms of an unambiguous *concept* of water, so any differences must be ascribed to pure appearance lacking any foundation in reality: the drops would not be real at all, only the ocean. Matter differentiates the drops, said the Scholastic, but this "matter" is not the "water."

We are trying to discover what happens to Man when he dies and what happens to the water of the drop when it is united (or reunited) with the ocean. Certainly, many things change or disappear. The question is whether something of each drop perdures, or even better, persists after death. Whatever persists would have the stamp of reality, for persistence implies more than simply to perdure. Existence is the diastole of beings in centrifugal motion; it is the universe in expansion. Existence constitutes time. Being can perdure solely through the inertia of existence. Persistence, on the other hand, is the systole of beings in centripetal movement; it is the universe in concentration, returning to its center, its "sistence" beyond the barrier of death.

What persists? What changes? A philosophical elucidation might answer by speaking of primary and secondary qualities, or of accidents and substance, or of beings and their attributes. Our concern, however, is the nature of the reality that is revealed at the threshold of death. Here we use death in its widest, most general sense as the cessation of everything that can cease to be, as the elimination of the drop and everything that prevents it from being and acting as water. Whatever crosses this threshold is being, or at least possesses immortality.

How would we characterize this "something"? What is "immortality"? As we have said, we cannot speak a single language that is valid at once for every culture. Buddhism, for example, does not recognize a substantial "something" that persists or changes. But even here our metaphor is useful: the drops of water would be part of a torrential rainfall in which the water that falls is in equilibrium with the water that is continually being formed into drops. When these fall as rain, they disappear as drops, and so on. Nothing perdures: only perpetual changes in an unending momentariness. The radical relativity (*pratityasamutpāda*) of reality persists.

An *ātmavādīc* perspective offers another approach. It distinguishes between the ultimate "I," the *aham*, the final source of action that some traditions call the divine or God or *Brahman*, and the psychological *ego* (*ahamkāra*), the conscious or unconscious origin of individual action, the individual soul (*jīva*). Simplifying a bit, we could say that the "I" is immortal and the *ego* is mortal. Immortality is achieved by purifying the *ego*, for it is precisely this purification that enables us to realize "our" "I." Or, returning to our metaphor, we attain immortality by becoming aware that we are water rather than drop, by choosing not to harden the wall that separates us, by achieving a victory over egotism, by realizing that our true "personality" or real "nature" lies in the water that we are. Clearly, immortality is a sort of a conquest. In the beginning, so the *Brahman* says, even the Gods were mortal.<sup>45</sup> They became immortal and invincible only as a result of their fervent concentration and sacrifice.<sup>46</sup> "In death there is immortality."<sup>47</sup> Another text says, "Life does not die."<sup>48</sup> The conquest of

<sup>45</sup> See *SB* II.2.2.8.

<sup>46</sup> See *SB* II.2.2.9–14; II.4.2.1.

<sup>47</sup> *antaram martyor amṛtam* (*SB* X.5.2.4).

<sup>48</sup> *CUVI.11.3.*

death consists of discovering, in the double sense of *gnosis* and realization of "our" "I," the true "I" that is unique for each of us because it is One without a second (*ekam evādvitiyam*).<sup>49</sup> At the same time, it means the death of our *ego*, which gives us the false impression that we possess as private property something we do not, indeed cannot, own. On the contrary, it is "this" alone that can possess us.

Now, a Buddhist would certainly not speak in these terms. He could, however, subscribe to what we are saying by interpreting the nature of the water and the "I" in a nonsubstantivist sense: both the water and the "I" would be the symbols of a natural dynamism without an underlying permanent substance.

Our metaphor permits yet another consideration. Even if we realize that we *are* water, we must continue to become water, again and again, for we are water indeed, but a water that is not fully liberated, a water that can vanish because it lacks "weight" or "gravity" or, one might say, maturity. The drop can fail to grow and does not fall into the sea. It can simply disappear before it has had time to rejoin the ocean. The result is what some would call hell: a miscarriage, a rent in the fabric of reality, a drop of water that has evaporated. As St. Thomas says, carrying St. Augustine's idea of evil as *privatio* to its logical conclusion: *Peccatores in quantum peccatores non sunt*.<sup>50</sup> This failure to grow or mature has also gone under the name of transmigration.<sup>51</sup> Water that is still burdened with all its idiosyncrasies as a drop remains in the atmosphere, in the temporal world. This drop does not attain liberation, does not "lose" itself in *Brahman*. Instead, it must continue its peregrinations under different guises: its water becomes part of other drops until these drops realize that they are water. The drop "dies" but its water, which in one life "dried up" by reason of the human vanities of an inauthentic existence, is not totally lost but becomes sublimated and continues on its way to realization. Indeed, following Śaṅkara, it is the water that actually "transmigrates": "There *is* in reality no transmigrating soul different from the Lord."<sup>52</sup>

What is death? The loss of the *ego*, which may disappear in order to fall into nothingness or in order to transmigrate into other drops. Alternatively, the *ego* may die in order to effect a passage to the "I." Here, death is the discovery of the living water. The drop grows until its membrane bursts open like the petals of a flower, and the drop falls into the infinite ocean, without losing itself as water. In a word, the *ego* dies in order for the *I* to live in us,<sup>53</sup> which is why many spiritual disciplines teach disinterested action,<sup>54</sup> the renunciation of the fruits of action,<sup>55</sup> "holy indifference" (to things and events), and liberation from the chains that bind us to the inauthentic. Likewise, if the one who acts is not purified, his actions will also be impure.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *CU VI.1.2.1.*

<sup>50</sup> *ST I*, q.20, a.2, ad 4. "Sinners as sinners are not."

<sup>51</sup> Here we are not trying to compare these two notions, we are only describing their phenomenological link from one point of view

<sup>52</sup> Or: "The Lord is the sole transmigrator" (*BS I.1.5*, trans. G. Thibaut). See my article, "La loi du karma et la dimension historique de l'homme," in *La théologie de l'histoire. Herméneutique et eschatologie*, Colloquium de l'Istituto di Filosofia (Rome), ed. E. Castelli (Paris: Aubier, 1971), 205–30.

<sup>53</sup> See *KaivU*, which says that only by renunciation can one attain eternal life; see also *BU III.5*; *MaitUVI.28*; as well as *Mt 19:21, 29*; *Mk 10:29–30*; *Lk 18:28–30*; *Jn 12:24–25*.

<sup>54</sup> See *BG V.2–3*; *UVI.35*; *XIV.13–14*; *Mt 6:3*.

<sup>55</sup> See *BG VI.1*; *Lk 17:7–10*.

<sup>56</sup> For this reason, neither "Quid hoc ad aeternitatem" [How is this (work, action) beneficial for eternal life?] nor *naïskarma* [disinterested action] can be used by an egotist to justify individualistic salvation.

We are so accustomed to identify the second perspective (Man as the *water* of the drop) with Indian spiritualities that it might be worthwhile to direct our attention to a striking text of St. Francis de Sales. We notice that Francis uses water as a symbol to express the reality of the creature as well as that of the Creator. In a chapter titled "De l'écoulement ou liquéfaction de l'âme en Dieu" (On the liquidization of the soul of God), we find, "si une goutte d'eau élémentaire jetée dans un océan d'eau denasse; était vivant et qu'elle pût parler et dire l'état auquel elle serait, ne crierait-elle pas de grande joie: O mortels, je vis vraiment, mais je ne vis pas moi-même, ainsi cet océan vit en moi et ma vie est cachée en cet abîme" (If one elementary drop of water thrown in the ocean drowns, was alive and could speak and tell about the state it is in, would it not cry in great joy: O mortals, I live really, but I do not live myself, but this ocean lives in me and my life is hidden in this abyss).<sup>57</sup>

The chapter begins with the words "Les choses humides et liquides reçoivent aisement les figures et limites qu'on leur veut donner" (The humid and liquid things receive easily the forms and limits one wants to give them [Taoist reminiscences?]). For this reason, we must possess "un coeur fondu et liquide" (a dissolved and liquid heart). So too, God says, I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone,<sup>58</sup> and likewise David confesses that his heart is "like wax, it is melted within my breast."<sup>59</sup> St. Francis continues in the same vein, using biblical images of water<sup>60</sup> to speak about the soul that "sort par cet écoulement sacré et fluidité sainte, et se quitte soi-même, non seulement pour s'unir au Bien-aimé, mais pour se mêler toute et se détremper avec lui" (comes out from this sacred flow and holy fluidity, abandons herself, not only to be united to the Beloved, but in order to merge entirely and be dissolved in Him)—"engloutie en son Dieu" (absorbed in her God).

Concluding the chapter, he cites the metaphor of the drop.<sup>61</sup> The text is clear: the drop of water is and exists as water; its life is the life of the ocean. Here St. Francis is referring to texts of St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,"<sup>62</sup> and "Your life is hidden with Christ in God."<sup>63</sup> Lest there be any doubt regarding his interpretation, Francis, the bishop of Geneva, ends by saying, "L'âme écoulée en Dieu ne meurt pas; car, comme pourrait-elle mourir d'être abîmée en la vie? Mais elle vit sans vivre en elle-même, parce que, comme les étoiles sans perdre leur lumière ne luissent plus en la présence du soleil, aussi l'âme, sans perdre sa vie, ne vit plus étant mêlée avec Dieu, ainsi Dieu vit en elle" (The soul that flows in God dies not, for how could it die after sinking into life? But it lives without living in itself, for, as the stars cease to shine in the presence of the sun yet they lose not their light, so the soul, without losing its life, having merged with God lives not, but rather it is God that in this way lives in it).

Our interest in these excerpts lies not so much in their discourse on the absorption of Man in God, a classic theme in Eastern as well as Western mysticism, as in their use of the metaphor of water, and even that of the drop. Both symbols are clearly intercultural.

We have seen the *drop* of water transformed into immortality, and we have seen the *water* of the drop grow to a point where the drop bursts and falls, like a ripe fruit, into the sea. Let me conclude with some further reflections on the metaphor.

<sup>57</sup> *Oeuvres*, ed. A. Ravier and R. Devos (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 646.

<sup>58</sup> Ezek 36:26.

<sup>59</sup> Ps 21:15.

<sup>60</sup> Num 20:8; Cant 1.3; V.6; VIII.6.

<sup>61</sup> We note that the ocean of divinity has the savory epithet "eau de nafte," that is, scented water, perfumed by orange blossoms.

<sup>62</sup> Gal 2:20.

<sup>63</sup> Col 3:3.

*First*, the need for a hermeneutic that does justice to intercultural problems. If we approach a different philosophical system using our own categories, we cannot help but misunderstand that system. If, in addition, our categories are foreign to the system we are examining, the misunderstanding will persist. Finding homeomorphic categories is a philosophical imperative of our times. In this study I have attempted to show that these categories cannot be concepts but must be symbols, and further, that metaphor can play an important role.<sup>64</sup> Our example has shown that far from expressing only a monistic concept of reality, the metaphor of the drop of water has more than one meaning even within a single culture. This is as it should be, for we are not seeking the uniformity of a single melody but a symphonic harmony.

*Second*, death is always "*sub specie individualitatis*": only an individual being dies. Moreover, consciousness of death is linked to consciousness of one's individuality. An entire species cannot experience death at once (although we know that species as such are mortal and do become extinct). This is true at every level: death means the death of an individual, but this "individual" can be a single-celled virus within our body, or the species of mammoths, or even our own species.<sup>65</sup> The individual could also be the drop of water or the water of the drop.

We experience death as the death of a part of ourselves that is smaller than the totality of our being: the death of a finger, an arm, an ideal, a love, a belief. We cannot experience the death of all our being.<sup>66</sup> It is only when the *aham* as *ātman* emerges and the *ego* is reduced to but a part of ourselves that the *ego* can die. Without the realization of the *ātman*, the death of the *ego* would amount to suicide, since its death would mean the absolute death of the human individual.<sup>67</sup>

To express this in psychological terms, we could examine the modern preoccupation with death. The many studies on this subject provide ample proof of this obsession on the part of Western Man, the intellectuals in particular.<sup>68</sup> With the rare exception of a very few monographs on a non-Western culture, however, Man is treated in all these studies as the drop, not as the water; as an individual in itself and not as the bearer of life. Man thinks of himself as the owner of life rather than its agent and, in a certain sense, its steward.<sup>69</sup> Man is treated above all as an individual, and death means its (individual) death. In this framework, philosophical reflection regarding death cannot go beyond psychology, since the ultimate subject is the human *psyche*. Perhaps the ancient Greek distinction between *bios* and *zoe*, that is between individual (biological) life and essential (zoological) life, would be helpful here.<sup>70</sup> Is it possible

<sup>64</sup> For a general study of metaphor, See P. Ricoeur, *La Métaphore* (Paris: Seuil, 1978).

<sup>65</sup> Indeed, a *novum* of our times is the awareness that the extinction of the *human* species lies in the realm of possibility, and perhaps even of probability.

<sup>66</sup> Whence the importance of the symbolism of the heart in so many cultures and religions. As the person's center, the heart *cannot* die without all of reality disappearing.

<sup>67</sup> Another example would be the famous (or infamous) distinction between "Welt-bejahenden und verneinenden Religionen." The question is whether one is denying a world that is positive (real) or negative (unreal).

<sup>68</sup> See the twenty-three-page bibliography of J. Wittkowski in his *Tod und Sterben. Ergebnisse der Thanatopsychologie* (UTB; 766) (Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1978). As a *curiosum*, we note that although the first part of the book is titled "Angst vor Tod und Sterben" and each page has five to ten footnotes, nowhere do we find the name of M. Heidegger. Obviously, Wittkowski's book deals only with psychology.

<sup>69</sup> See the 3,806 titles on this subject in *Death, Grief and Bereavement: A Bibliography* (1845-1975), comp. R. Fulton (New York: Arno Press, 1977).

<sup>70</sup> See K. Kerenyi in his "Introduction" to *Dionysos* (New Haven, CT: Bollingen Series, 1977).

to separate these two "kinds" of life? When the individual *bios* discovers the *zoe* of totality, it does not lose its personality.<sup>71</sup>

Third, we find ourselves today in an intercultural world. We should not examine any problem from only one perspective or be satisfied by an answer given by a single culture.<sup>72</sup>

It is clear that the people of the world do not understand or "live" death in the same way.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the double fact that thousands of humans die every day of unnatural deaths and that all of humanity faces the very real possibility of its collective death makes the problem even more acute. As we have said, the study of death has today become almost fashionable; however the roots of our concerns lie deeper than the current philosophical interest, which for the most part owes its existence to the repression or consciousness of death in the modern West.<sup>74</sup> It may be that our acute awareness also has something to do with the unconscious instinct of a humanity on the way to extinction.

An intercultural problem already mentioned can serve as an example of what I am saying here. Does the historical death of Man on this planet mean the absolute end of conscious life? It certainly does for those who "live" in the myth of history; but it does not for those who "live" in the myth of another cosmology. It is not easy to understand one myth if we cannot transcend our own myth. We can, however, agree that much of the contemporary world is preoccupied with the possibility of just such a cataclysm while others, hardly aware of the decline of the human race, are much less affected by it. If human life is a purely anthropological phenomenon, then a major nuclear catastrophe would mean the end of life. If, on the other hand, human life is part of a cosmic phenomenon, then a large-scale nuclear disaster on our planet would only be yet another in a series of explosions among the stars. The life we bear will continue in some other form on some other "World." With this in mind, it may be possible to instill a drop of cosmic hope in the first group and encourage a little historical responsibility in the second. Perhaps the metaphor of the drop has something to contribute here even if we do not believe in the myth of the other. Can we not transmythicize it into a more familiar symbol?<sup>75</sup>

A fourth lesson is that the value of this metaphor is very limited in our modern world. Clearly, the idea of individual immortality in some "other world" is problematic for many today, but the heading toward an earthly paradise is even more doubtful. On the other hand, belief in immortality is not only a source of consolation for some people; it also inspires heroic virtues. Furthermore, the secular alternative can itself be a noble ideal and trigger a complete devotion. In both cases, the ego is surpassed and the person is realized without requiring the immortality of the individual.

Likewise, if one posits an immortality that goes beyond the individual, whether on a vertical or on a horizontal plane, similar difficulties arise for modern Man. Nevertheless,

<sup>71</sup> It is good to recall that the *aiona zōē* of the Evangelist is not a perdurable *bios*; see Jn 4:14; 12:50; 17:2-3.

<sup>72</sup> See Frank Reynolds and Earl H. Waugh, eds., *Religious Encounters with Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1977).

<sup>73</sup> See R. Panikkar, "Die Zeit des Todes, der Tod der Zeit: Eine indische Betrachtung," in *Der Tod in den Weltkulturen und Weltreligionen*, ed. C. van Barloewen (Frankfurt: Insel, 2000), 340-53, where I introduce two basic attitudes toward death: life in front of us ("Sein zum Tode") and life behind us (the more one lives, the further away from death one goes).

<sup>74</sup> As an example, see R. Huntington and P. Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>75</sup> See R. Panikkar, "La demitologizzazione nell'incontro tra Cristianesimo e Induismo," in *Il problema della demitizzazione*, ed. E. Castelli (Padova: CEDAM, 1961).

belief in the immortality or even the divinity of one's most intimate core can lead to the realization of the person.

Are these two approaches mutually exclusive, or could they be complementary? Some would say that we are mortal drops of immortal water. Others would ask if we cannot achieve a mutual fecundation in such a way that we not only aspire to immortality as water, but attain it as drop; and not only as a drop metamorphosed in another world but one retaining the living membrane of a drop of this earth.<sup>76</sup> Could not *bios* and *zoe* belong together? We are back where we started.

*Fifth*, and last, a lesson in humility, having in mind its etymological connotation of harmony and union with nature. In our metaphor, the life of Man is homologous both to the drop and to the water! (That is to say, to natural phenomena.) Human destiny has been compared to at least one phase of the natural cycle. Not wishing to abuse the metaphor, we have not suggested further comparisons by evoking the rising of the ocean's water to heaven and descent of the clouds over the earth in the form of raindrops that feed the fields and rivers. I would only say this: the destiny of human life is linked to the destiny of natural life. Once we reach our "ocean," who can say that we are not the essence or life of this ocean? More simply: we participate in the destiny of the water of the entire universe. Man, the World, and the Divine share a common destiny, and they are linked by a fundamental *religio*, the constitutive *dharma* of the universe.

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<sup>76</sup> A typical example of a modern Christian is the lovely work of J. M. Ballarin, *Pregària al vent*, 2nd ed. (Montserrat: Publicaciones de l'Abadía, 1979). "Vull dir que ni al cel no ens desfarem com un bolado mític en l'oceà de l'infinít" (82). The identical image of the ocean!

## SECTION III

### WORSHIP<sup>1</sup>

*To Ramón Roquer  
who from the beginning  
has been to me  
a living symbol of faithfulness  
to his calling.*

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Orig. edn. *Worship and Secular Man* (New York: Dalton and Orbis, 1973, reprinted 1975). Reviewed version, *Culto y secularización. Apuntes para una antropología litúrgica* (Madrid: Marova, 1979).



## INTRODUCTION

*Satyam eva upacāra.  
Worship is first of all truth.*

*S II.2.2.20<sup>1</sup>*

The phenomenon of specialization, which is characteristic of our age, has resulted in the question of worship being dealt with exclusively by experts in the various fields of human knowledge and almost never as a *human invariable*. While most animals perform acts that may be regarded as rituals in that they are repeated instinctively, man alone is a cultural being, a liturgical animal. This study aims to present an approach that is literally human.

Worship is the act by which man actively cooperates with the rest of creation (gods and other beings) in the building (maintenance) of his own life and that of the cosmos.

The following study deals with the question in its complexity and unity, while attempting, at the same time, to give a tangible interpretation of Christian worship.

The original Spanish version, which dates back to over half a century ago, has been kept basically intact as it represents a testimony of the spirit that characterized the Christian environment during the period of the Second Vatican Council.

Milarupa  
October 2007

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<sup>1</sup> This could be also be translated as "Only the truth is worship," or "Worship is the only reality," or "Reality is only worship." *Satya* means "to be" [reality] and "truth" [from the root *as*, "to be"]. *Upa-cāra* literally means "drawing near" and therefore "service," "relation" (a way of drawing near to people, to reality), "walking toward" (from the root *car*, "togo," "to walk"). True mediation is *upacāra*.

Man cannot live without rituals. We cannot ignore the need for worship. And although today a large part of humanity no longer feels inspired by traditional religions, this does not prevent man from seeking new forms or dedicating himself to exotic (and less exotic) forms of worship. The sacred—which, until recently, a good number of intellectuals, especially in the Western world, believed to be almost completely outmoded—is returning, and actually invading the modern mentality in the most varied forms. The waves of secularization seem to be receding, and on the foamy crests appear new forms of the sacred. Yet the ocean is not merely waves and foam. Man is more and, at the same time, less than what he thinks he is.

This study does not intend to follow the tides of trend; after letting many moons pass, it rises to defend the sacredness of the secular—not as a timid compromise or a superficial attitude but, rather, as an integration of what remains of modernity when it is incorporated into tradition.

The first chapter reproduces (with slight changes) an article that aims at summarizing a Christian reflection on liturgy.<sup>2</sup> The following chapters are an amplified elaboration of an essay on "worship in a secularized age."<sup>3</sup> The Spanish version has merely been translated; the Italian version has been revised and altered before being translated into English. I point this out in order to emphasize that it is not a complete and systematic dissertation. Not only is man polyhedral, but worship is also multidimensional, and this book deals with one aspect of the problem only. It aims to be a critical study without being iconoclastic. And, in this age of verbal inflation and inundations of writings, this essay is intentionally laconic. It goes no further than suggesting, and leaves further reflections to the discretion of the reader.<sup>4</sup>

Let us continue on a personal note: more than once I have had the impression that my best communications with men have been my homilies, and sometimes I have felt a certain regret for the fact that they have never been put into writing. Nevertheless, the reality of liturgy lies in the fact that it wears out, it burns like a sacrifice and is consumed the moment it is performed. The song is not a song until it is sung; prayer is not such until it is offered; liturgy is only real in its execution and fulfillment. The homily is only a cultural act if it is a unique act whose only justification lies in the very act of delivering it. Only when the cultural action burns itself out, like a burnt offering, can it allow itself to be performed again in a brand-new form, like the first time. Genuine worship is never repeated: it is re-created. Life is not based on a repetition of the past with projections toward the future, but on the "temporarity" of the genuine moments of existence, which are those that, like sacrifice, are consumed as they come to pass. The fact that man is a ritual being means that he has been given the possibility to live life beyond time and space—though without escaping either. This surpassing of space and time in human existence is what is carried through in worship.

It is understandable that, when ritual degenerates into ritualism and mannerism and liturgy is reduced to formalism and rubricism, as soon as magic and hypocrisy become evident there appears that healthy reaction that strives to eliminate all that is artificial in ritual and restore authenticity to man's relationships with his fellow creatures, with things,

<sup>2</sup> *Design for American Worship* is the special issue of *Chicago Studies* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1977), dedicated to the question of contemporary liturgy, the first article of which, "Man as a Ritual Being," I reproduce here by permission of the publisher.

<sup>3</sup> *Worship in a Secular Age* was a "consultation" held by the World Council of Churches in Geneva in 1969. See *Worship and Secularization*, published by W. Vos, Bussum, Holland (Liturgical Ecumenical Center Trust), 1970, available also in German, *Gottesdienst in einem säkularisierten Zeitalter*, published by K. F. Müller, Kassel (Scauda), Trier (Paulinus), 1971.

<sup>4</sup> The author has held a number of university courses on the subject in which these problems have been discussed in depth; in this book, however, he has preferred to keep the discussion to the basics.

or with God. This is what has happened to a large part of rituals in the West: they have lost, to say the least, much of their potential.

However, it is not enough to rant against degeneration or blame it on the fact that man is weak or sinful. It is necessary to find a more convincing cause than that of the "original sin" in a Christian context or "exploitation by the privileged classes" in a Marxist context. One of the reasons for this degeneration of the ritual, I believe, is the natural consequence of the ideological domination of modern science in the basic life and mentality of Western culture, beginning from the appearance of such trends some four centuries ago. In short, it is about the objectification of reality, firstly of predominance and secondly of monopoly, of the impersonal relationship with things, including people, that have thus become increasingly transformed into objects of study and information. To science the important relationship is the objective relationship: the relationship with the *it*, the *id*, the thing, the phenomenon, the world of objects—that which Ferdinand Ebner or Martin Buber would call the "I-It" relationship, as opposed to the "I-Thou" relationship.

The essence of the genuine ritual seems to me to be that of the "I-Thou" and, oftentimes, the "Thou-I" relationship. Ritual is the counterpart of science. While science continues to be based on the I-It relationship, ritual, on the other hand, neither objectivizes nor can be objectivized. Ritual is not the scientific study of ritual itself. It lies before or beyond the subject/object relationship. Ritual is not what phenomenology (which would be methodologically false) might have us believe: certain subjects (human) who deal with certain objects (believed to be superhuman). Ritual not only implies the participation of the I and the Thou, but is precisely the manner of treating the Thou as a Thou (and not as a thing). The language of ritual is the first or second person; that of science is the third. While "s is P" is the scientific paradigm, *tat tvam asi* or YHWH is what pertains to the language of worship. The human relationship is ritual when the neighbor is something more than an object; human love is ritual when the person is revealed as being not merely an object of pleasure or even of love, but a constitutive relationship that allows the I to be I and the Thou to be Thou. Ritual is the very form of human coexistence as well as the form of the relationship with the divine, the numinous, the mysterious, or however we choose to call it. Things themselves demand to be treated ritually—and without this liturgical aspect the entire ecological science is no more than just another form of exploitation in a more refined version.<sup>5</sup> A ritual greeting is a personal exchange, the creation of a space that allows each one to be what he is in relation with his interlocutor. Speech is ritual when it is not merely a tool of information but a communication that enables communion if the speech is accepted. If science is information regarding things, ritual is the communion of persons within the sacred. All ritual is dialogical and personalizing, whether it involves human beings or so-called forces of nature or the divine. It is about personal relationships as such. In every ritual man enters into a personal relationship with his fellows, with the cosmos, and with the divine.

Ritual is not a purely intellectual problem—it is eminently practical and existential. Yet neither is it a merely "religious" question in the strict sense of the word. The theme of ritual is vital to an existential attitude, to human commitment in favor of the transformation of man in his multiple dimensions and, clearly, his social and political aspect. Men and populations will not be able to free themselves from enforced forms of living and from enslaving structures (political, economic, cultural, and religious) if they do not find their own rituals, their own rhythms, and their own salvific liturgy. It is not, perhaps, by writing books, but neither is it by plunging headlong into a sort of blind struggle that a population finds its identity

<sup>5</sup> In relation to this, I introduced the idea of *ecosophia*.

and its freedom. Man saves and frees himself by bringing about, re-presenting, putting into effect the ritual that gives meaning to the life of the individual and society. If the conquest of freedom is not converted into a salvific ritual, man becomes more and more entangled each time he attempts to break free from the nets that hold him prisoner—whether they be mental, economic, political, or spiritual nets. In short, the sense of worship lies at the very core of human existence. Worship can rightly be said to be that human activity by which man moves toward his liberation, wholeness, salvation, destiny . . . or however we choose to call it.

To express this in the ancient words of the *Tao-te Ching*:

When the path (*tao*) disappears, virtue (*te*) appears  
when virtue disappears, magnanimity (*jen*) appears  
when magnanimity disappears, justice (*yi*) appears  
when justice disappears, ritual (*li*) appears.

Barcelona, Christmas 1977

## THE MEANING OF WORSHIP

## A Fairy Tale

*Once upon a time* there was a Man. Unlike "primitive" man, this Man had lived consciously for thousands of years. He had survived the *avatāra* of his history, and had all the data and riches of the world at his disposal; yet it seemed he did not have hope. He could no longer bear to look up. He remembered the meager success of every type of "progress" and the failure of all "humanisms" in liberating man from his inhumanity. Wars, revolutions, and violence had overwhelmed him and had solved nothing. All the sophisticated stratagems of human naïveté had long become tiresome and monotonous, and all the lofty conquests of the human spirit had proved incapable of satisfying even the most basic of human needs. And while the Man himself was "educated" and well-fed, millions died of hunger, victims of injustice. The Man experienced regret for this and felt himself falter; he doubted that the future could be endurable, found his present unbearable, and knew that his past was hopelessly lost to him. He was also aware that he could not bring back the past; yet even if he could, he knew well that he would certainly not wish to live in it. He had built himself a complete vision of the world, which some would call *ideology*. He had contemplated everything; he had thought about all that was imaginable and discovered the impotence of reason along with its justification. He could demonstrate the existence of God and equally disprove every piece of "evidence"; he could find life full of meaning, but also argue in favor of its senselessness. He could, through technology, imagine that he solved all his problems and, at the same time, prove that this was the greatest plague that had ever afflicted human existence. He began to perceive that so-called freedom and democracy were no more than an expression of human desperation to find the truth. His thinking began to waver. He sensed the fear that any kind of action would cause him; he tried avoiding ever examining the ultimate consequences of anything. Then finally, exhausted, he began to search for an icon, to sing, to dance, to gesticulate, and even something similar to a clumsily spoken prayer rose from his being. Very soon he fell asleep, or dead, or annihilated by forces that escaped his control. No one noticed his disappearance. And yet something had happened.

*The Starting Point: A Human Concern*

The more that modern Western man contemplates his situation, the more he appears disoriented with regard to the ultimate meaning of his life and his civilization. At the heart of this process is an acute crisis of ritual life, which is, ultimately, a crisis of symbols. This is a point on which even the most diverse thinkers agree.

Do there exist at present symbols that remain intact for Western man? In which direction must he look today for universal symbols? "God" has become factional; "Nation"

questionable; "Democracy" suspicious; "Power" ambiguous; "Progress" critical; "Goodness" relative, "Beauty" subjective, and "Truth" unattainable; "Capitalism" is a hateful word, and "Socialism" is no better, and so on. It is hardly surprising that the rituals in which symbols are experienced and represented also go adrift, or that in mainstream Christian churches the crisis of the liturgical celebration has a much deeper origin than the mere confusion deriving from the reformation of certain official texts for worship or the decision of Vatican II to allow the ancient retaining walls to crumble. Even so-called new religions encounter great difficulty in giving cultural expression to their beliefs, and this, in fact, may be one of the causes of the short-lived nature of many such movements. It is not possible to survive for long with purely intellectual intuitions. Man's intuitions are "tempiternal" in time and space and need tangible incarnations. He desires to associate his own body with that of his neighbor, here and now, in communion with a higher reality. Referring to a more ancient tradition, the *Rimayaya* tells us that the demons are called *asura* because (aside from the etymological explanations given by scholars) they refused to join Varuni, the wife of Varuna and goddess of liquor; and the gods are called *surā*, because they accepted wine (*surā*) as a communion offering. Gods are festive beings and invite men to their celebrations; demons, on the other hand, are sad! In short, man cannot live without rituals.

The interpretations of this fact may be varied. Some see it as a kind of liberation, a way to rid ourselves of an excessively ascetic mentality; others, however, fear that the cure may be worse than the ailment. Some hope for a return to the roots of tradition, while others uphold the advantages of moving freely forward, unencumbered by the weight of the past.

### *The Need for a New Beginning*

To those of the clergy, who are in immediate contact with the lives of the people, the problem becomes a serious concern. Yet, precisely because of its urgency, the directions that they generally take—either left or right—do not cease to be positive or negative reactions in the face of a superficially judged status quo. Thus we obtain a series of reforms, mutations, embellishments, and aesthetic interventions that are well meant but, generally speaking, lack the foundation that could help us to be aware of the problem. It is not simply a question of making things work better or striving harder to achieve the desired results. The problem lies elsewhere and must, rather, be considered on a deeper level in its entirety. In Christian terms, we would simply say that we are in need of a *metanoia*, a radical conversion from our contrived and history-laden routines to a new beginning, in which the human being is not suffocated but rather in harmony with the cosmic and the divine. The fundamental nature that must characterize this attempt becomes clear: it involves listening (i.e., *ob-audire*: to listen means to obey) to the vaster reality of the universe, in which man is not alone. In traditional religious language this conversion means a critical, yet trusting, obedience to the Spirit that constantly renews all things. In other words, the solution does not lie in discovering new techniques, or in being "creative" according to our models of creativity, but in preparing ourselves for a new innocence that allows us to celebrate life and is constantly renewed, enjoying it without being forced to repeat ourselves continually and with increasingly less enthusiasm.

Scholars used to cite an ancient saying from the Proverbs, which says that God has made all things for Himself (*omnia propter semetipsum operatus est Dominus*), just as the traditional Indian masters emphasized that the *yoga* did not exist for man, but vice versa. Perhaps all humanisms have begun to exhaust their potential.<sup>1</sup> It is reasonable to suspect that this state

<sup>1</sup> See my article (much debated in its day) "Christianity Is Not a Humanism," *Arbor* 62 (February 1951), which is included in the chapter "Beyond Humanism," in *Humanismo y cruz* (Madrid: Rialp,

of affairs is the high cost that Western civilization has had to pay for the prodigious successes of its rational power. We have neglected our human roots, and our lives have become impoverished. Modern Western Man has centered his being on reason alone, and reason on mere rationality. We might say that orthodoxies of every type have taken the place of *orthopraxis*, which embraces a great deal more, or that mere *potesis* or every sort of activism has upset the delicate balance between action and contemplation, the material and the spiritual, the human and the divine. It is not now a question of going back on our tracks and replacing the modern anthropocentrism with the old theocentrism, since these were left behind and made obsolete the moment we acknowledged that everything must be filtered through our human categories. Rather than continuing here this criticism of modernity by developing and clarifying these opinions, however, let us consider the problem from a different angle. Bearing in mind all constructive criticisms and essays on the subject, we shall attempt here to integrate and harmonize the different fields represented by Western disciplines, together with the various contributions of other civilizations (and without overlooking primordial religions). I should, perhaps, apologize for this rather overly schematic presentation, although the rest of the book will probably explain in a little more depth what remains here *in statu nascendi*.

### *The Central Point: A Cosmotheandric Problem*

For the purpose of introducing our subject, we begin with a description of what ritual represents; we then continue with a contemplation of the power of ritual symbolism, and conclude by discussing the meaning of liturgical action in the light of man's religious experience.

#### *Phenomenology of Ritual*

Any ritual is first of all an act or an event. Ritual does not belong to the sphere of thought; it is neither a doctrine nor an ideal entity, it does not relate exclusively to the domain of *logos*. It belongs, rather, to the field of *mythos*, of exterior and corporal manifestation. A good intention or a noble thought are not rituals. Ritual belongs to the sphere of incarnation, the visible, temporal, and spatial. A football match or a bullfight may be a ritual, but writing or reading a book can hardly be considered as such.

The human being can be observed carrying out many kinds of actions. There is a certain continuity between the subjective intent of an act and its objective purpose. Man needs food and so he hunts, cultivates the land, and cooks. Yet there are certain gestures in which the outside observer cannot discern the congruence between the immediate purpose of an act and its remote intention. The observer perceives a hiatus that is not regarded in the same way by those who perform the ritual. The observer sees people eating, not because they are hungry but because they desire to receive the energy of God, or destroy the evil power of an enemy—a fact that is known only within the group since no outsider is allowed to share in this particular banquet. The observer discovers that the people dance not for the physical pleasure of letting themselves be carried away by the music but for the desire that the body also be transformed into music; he discovers a higher law through music or dance itself, thus imagining something similar to a transcendental intention that those who are outside the actual context in which the act is celebrated cannot easily recognize. The participant takes for granted or, more precisely, believes (unlike the observer) that the prayer can bring rain, the song appease the divinity, the blessing forgive sins, the sacred meal bestow grace, and so on. The believer knows for certain that there is a rift between the empirical act and its

invisible or transcendent objective, yet is equally convinced that, in this particular context, the act he is performing is a possible means to achieving his purpose.

In this first approach we have used the words "intention" (subjective) and "purpose" (objective); let me add straightaway that the aim of ritual is very particular. It is not a causal intention, as in most of the acts we perform. If I want an apple I will get it from a tree or the market. If I want a child I will try to generate the child with a woman. But if I pray for a meal or perform the *ashvamedha* sacrifice to have a child, it is not for the purpose of substituting agricultural or biological causality with this ritual. The very essence of the magic lies in converting the special purpose of ritual into a causal intention. The magical act is effective if it is performed well—if the pin is properly stuck into the doll, in the right place and the right way, the man against whom the act is directed will automatically suffer the corresponding ills. We may assume that magic works with causality outside the physical field. Ritual does not. The fact that a rift exists, that the meal is believed to provide spiritual strength or the petitions of the prayer to be granted, introduces constitutive ambiguity and a range of possibilities pertaining to the very nature of ritual. Ritual interprets the transcendent in a transcendent way; it conceives *alaukika upiya* (to grasp the nonmundane), as Sāyana writes in his classic comment on the *Black Yajur Veda*.

In short, ritual appears as an act by which man expresses, obtains, communicates, proposes, or carries out something that would not be produced in any other way. And yet not even the ritual act is able to fully achieve its purpose: it indicates, suggests, intimates, announces—it reveals by concealing. Simply put, we may say that half of the act remains permanently transcendent. The goal of the ritual act is to scale a mountain whose peaks are visible, yet without ever reaching the top—like Moses who led his people to the promised land but never entered himself. And on the rare occasions when ritual does produce the illuminating experience, the Taboric transformation, we have already transcended it. There is no room for two (the ego and its conscious reflection) on the mountaintop. "By the grace of God *I am what I am*," St. Paul writes to the Corinthians,<sup>2</sup> in a style similar to that of the *Upaniṣad*, *aham asmi*: "I am."<sup>3</sup>

For this reason, one of the characteristics of ritual is repetition. Not so much, or not merely, because it revives a primordial action that takes place *in illo tempore*, but also because no isolated ritual action can fully attain the transcendent. Man recommences his prayers and renews his vows, he worships, eats, dances, and meditates again, following a model of varying flexibility that seems to be conditioned by the very purpose of the action itself and not by someone's decision.

The expression "once and for all," used in certain special rituals (such as those of initiation, weddings and burials, and so on.) does not negate what we have said. First of all, these actions may be assumed to transcend time, thereby leading us to the far shore from which there is no return. Initiation causes something to be broken once and for all. A marriage is made in heaven but celebrated on earth, says a Hindū proverb, which corresponds to the evangelical saying, "What God has joined together let no man put asunder."<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, as long as we live in time and space, ritual must keep its bond with the transcendent alive. A "second birth" lasts forever, and the marriage bond is believed to be permanent, yet the sacred character of a brahman can be lost and marriages can break up. Rituals are needed, therefore, to sustain our vital bond with transcendence. Every genuine commemoration is a sort of reactualization. If I do not live as a brahman, behave as a spouse,

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 15:10.

<sup>3</sup> BU 14.1.

<sup>4</sup> Mt 19:6.

or act as a priest, the ontic reality may be supplanted by a new ontological factor. The anniversary of a coronation or a constitution, the celebration of a victory, or the renewal of a vow is something greater than the commemoration of a fact confined to the past: it reinforces and revives the present.

To put it in the words of the *Upaniṣad*, the specific sphere of ritual is not that of the objects of the senses, neither that of the concepts of the mind, nor that of the images of the will; it is that of the field of *avyakta*, the unmanifested, the invisible, the transcendent. As it says in the Letter to the Hebrews,<sup>5</sup> "He persevered because he saw Him who is Invisible," referring to the greatest prophet of the Jewish testament.

If all that existed were what the eye could see, or the will could desire, or the intellect could perceive, there would be no room in human life for ritual, except, perhaps, as a temporary precursor of that which is as yet unknown, unexplored, that which has still to be ratified by man's reason. It could then be tolerated as the "prescientific" attitude of the ignorant, as the "religious" balm that soothes our ignorance, or as the first hesitant step toward knowledge, whether we choose to call it *science* or *gnosis*.

Phenomenology may, of course, permeate the details of the different rituals and complete the picture we have given above, yet it cannot basically add much more, neither can it hazard any philosophical interpretation.

This is what we will attempt to do now.

### *Philosophy of Ritual as a Symbol*

Ritualism is the greatest enemy of the rite. Ritualism is no more than the mere preservation of the outward appearance of ritual without the inner faith that inspired it—the inertia of rubrics without the quickening power of *nigris*; the empty shell, the habit of holding onto a certain action even after it has lost its symbolic power. In other words, ritualism makes its appearance when we insist on performing a certain ritual despite the fact that we have since found another, more direct way to express what hitherto could only be effectively expressed through ritual.

We have talked about ritual as an act that extends far beyond the immediate purpose of the isolated action itself: the ritual of anointing the sick has a much broader purpose than the mere sedative effect of the balm. In other words, the ritual is a symbolic act—an act, that is, that possesses a special power of symbolizing "that" which could not be symbolized in any other way. Now a symbol, unlike a sign, is not an epistemological signal, a quid pro quo, in relation to a recognized convention. A symbol is the manifestation of "that" which it alone can reveal. It is the symbol of symbolized reality, which appears in it alone. Our body is not our (whole) being, but neither is it a mere part of it, and yet it is the symbol of what we are—so much so (as we will discuss later) that without our body we cannot talk about ourselves as we are.

For the same reason, the symbol does not lie in the object alone nor in the subject; it is neither merely objective nor purely subjective. It is essentially a relationship; it represents a symbol only to those who regard it as such and those who, in this way, relate to it directly. This is why a symbol that has to be interpreted is no longer a symbol. The true symbol would be what enables us to interpret the former symbol (which is already made obsolete by this very fact). The symbol is good, as salt is good; yet if it loses its symbolic power, like salt losing its savor, "Wherewith shall it be salted?" Once the various symbolic acts of the mass, for example, fail to reveal their meaning to the people, they cease to be living symbols. Nevertheless, this

<sup>5</sup> Heb 11:27.

concept should not be regarded in an individualistic manner. Symbols have a power that far transcends the individual's capacity for comprehension and acceptance. It is quite possible for the individual to feel inspired by the "charm" of a ritual that he does not fully grasp but that remains alive, nevertheless, in his vital environment. As we said earlier, in fact, a symbol does not allow itself to be interpreted, or to depend on an intermediary for explaining its meaning. To put it simply, we do not learn symbols, we open ourselves to them, rediscover ourselves in them, and by simply participating in them we are brought to the understanding of what they symbolize. The symbol is a mediator, not an intermediary. Ultimately, as we will see, we believe in symbols.

This does not mean we are not in a condition to "learn" what the symbolic experience reveals to us. A symbol interpreted is no longer a symbol, yet as long as this mediation is able to touch the center of my being, I can still come into contact with it.

Having established that the ritual is a symbolic act, if it is authentic (despite the fact that it may refer only to a very specific aspect of human life and be limited in both capacity and form), it concerns, ultimately, the very center of the human being. In other words, that is, every authentic ritual invariably expresses the ultimate dynamism of being that is in man. In the famous words of an *Upaniṣad*, "Not for their own sake are husband, wife or children, nor health, nor the world or the gods held dear, but for the sake of *ātman*." The authentic ritual is always *adhyātmic*; it refers to the ultimate mystery of existence without excluding or disregarding the penultimate passages of intermediate things.

#### *Theology of the Ritual Action*

I realize that what I am about to say may appear as a simple idealization of the function of the ritual. We are so used to considering the past as belonging to the "primitive" and "undeveloped" that any interpretation of ancient culture may seem biased. I do not negate the dark aspects of the past, but if we study ancient documents we have to recognize a depth we are not accustomed to today.

In and through the ritual, as we have said, man directs himself to transcendence, however he interprets it.

Man cannot live without projecting himself toward that which he is yet to be—he cannot endure the *pondus vitae* without the propulsion that can help him bear the weight of a merely temporal existence with the hope of reaching, in one way or another, the transtemporal. Man is the animal that constantly aspires *plus ultra*, both vertically and horizontally, in time and in space, and beyond his own limits by means of spiritual disciplines, art, politics, science, and so on. A more traditional way of expressing this tension is by talking of the desire for God, the search for happiness or the struggle for salvation, freedom, or wholeness, which are innate to the heart of man.

Since the early stages of almost all civilizations this thirst for transcendence, as we may call it, seems to have been related to an action, a sacred action—perhaps to sacrifice; certainly to the complexity of rituals through which the human being may be realized and achieve the "salvation" to which he aspires. This is the *karmakānda* of the Vedic religion, the sacrificial cults of the majority of traditions, of liturgy as it was lived in the first centuries of Christian history and as it is still defined today in the first constitution of Vatican II: the church exists for the liturgy that lives within it, since the precise aim of liturgy is the salvation of man and the entire universe. It is clear that this *leitourglia* (common action, activity of the people, public action) cannot be identified with an assortment of "sacred" celebrations.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See the constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium* in the context of the other conciliar documents.

In all this, it would seem that there is a second stage in most human traditions, more kairological than chronological, in which sacred actions are so interiorized that the decisive act becomes an act of the mind. There is a famous passage in the *Vedas* in which Yājñavalkya is asked with what he would perform the life-giving sacrifice if the necessary materials were not available. With milk, he replied, or with grass or water or another thing if the proposed substitute cannot be found. And if I had absolutely nothing, he added, I would still be able to perform the sacrifice with nothing but faith alone.<sup>7</sup> Neither in Jerusalem, nor on Garizin...<sup>8</sup>

The process is very complex. We may, however, give at least one example in the evolution of the Western Christian world.

This example dates back to around the thirteenth century, when explanations regarding the existence of God began to be considered as proof rather than mere efforts at demonstrating that the existence of God is not contrary to reason. We might also relate it to the invention of printing, which occurred shortly afterward. I refer to the change, which took place toward the end of the Scholastic period, from the acknowledgment of the symbolic power of actions and images to the recognition of the intellectual power of reason and ideas. Up until that time, what was believed to give salvation and happiness was active participation in the symbolic power of ritual, integrated in the community life of liturgical participation, and in the power of images. Now, after this change, we believe that what puts us in touch with the transcendent is the power of the mind, the light of reason, the idea, which is able to reach the heights of the divine. Even the existence of God may be proved; this implies that the foundation of intellectual proof (ultimately, our intellect) is not only capable of reaching the transcendent, but is also somehow more powerful, given that it becomes the very basis of the proof. It is true that the scholars knew very well the difference between *quoad se* (for itself) and *quoad nos* (for us) yet, nevertheless, the organ of transcendence continues to be the intellect and not the praxis, the action, the ritual. It is hardly surprising that *pandit*, intellectuals, "enlightened" minds and "educated" people soon began to regard religious praxis as merely a concern of the uneducated masses; those who had knowledge did not need to perform sacrifices, or go to Mass, or belong to an institutionalized religion. In this type of mentality, religious practices are, for the most part, replaced by real knowledge, whether it be called sacred *gnosis* or secular science. And here begins the crisis of ritual, which falls to an order of secondary importance. Was it not written in John also that eternal life consists in knowing Him? Was not the Christian revolution, in fact, a reaction against the "elements of this world"? Was not the Protestant reform also a strong warning regarding the fact that we are saved by "faith alone"? Has not the question of Christianity "without religion" been seriously discussed in contemporary Catholic environments? Am I, then, once again defending primitive religiosity and the worship of trees, rivers, and rocks? Am I interceding in favor of astrology and polytheism? Am I rejecting reason and invoking the return of Dionysus?

I am neither for the "tonal" nor the "nagual."<sup>9</sup> We are contemplating the nature of the ritual act, and I would venture to say that mere unilateral reactions in favor of rationality or irrationality do not solve the problem, which is due not only or mainly to the partiality of extreme positions, but to the very fact that the question of ritual eludes this dialectical presentation. Dialectics belong to the sphere of rational *lógos*, and to it alone; ritual does not. The most appropriate way to deal with ritual, therefore, cannot be exclusively dialectical,

<sup>7</sup> See *SB* XI.3.1.2-4.

<sup>8</sup> See *Jn* 4:21.

<sup>9</sup> Two terms referring to the yaqui wisdom revealed in the works of Carlos Castañeda. See, for example, *Tales of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), 103ff.

unless we consider that the nature of reality as a whole is dialectic, which would be, at the very least, an unjustified extrapolation.

Whatever the nature of reality, we may begin with a negative criticism of modern intellectualism and then proceed with a more positive defense of the ritual.

After the collapse of so-called German idealism and the devastating experience of Western Man in the last two world wars (despite the predominant role given to rationality), it does not seem strange to proclaim the philosophical theory that human reason has no salvific power, and that rationality alone cannot, *de facto*, solve the human situation.

We could equally claim (basing on the assumption that transcendence may contribute to the liberation of the human being) that the very concept of transcendence itself is a contradiction in terms: it denies what it states. If transcendence is a concept, then (at least in the measure in which I conceive it) it is not beyond my power of conception, and therefore it is not transcendent. The realm of transcendence may be out of my reach—or out of reach of my body or, at times, of my will—but it is not beyond the power of my mind, which speaks and presumes to conceive of it. We may make all the subtle distinctions we like between essence and existence, or whatever else, but the fact still remains that, in the measure in which we presume to have a concept of transcendence, this same concept is responsible for its destruction, at least from a noetic point of view.

So now we have prepared the ground for the defense of the ritual action. I do not intend to advocate the return of an irremediably lost innocence, or to say that we must fall into a state of trance or dedicate ourselves to that which could only appear to us as superstition. I spoke at the beginning about a new innocence, not a contrived effort to regain primitive innocence. The tree of the science of good and evil has spread its roots everywhere throughout our human land, and cannot be uprooted without destroying us. Moreover, as the *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* says: this tree is upside-down; it has its roots in the sky and bears its fruit on the earth.<sup>10</sup> This, in fact, is not only our human condition—it is the very structure of reality as a whole. The *felix culpa* of the Easter liturgy is far more than mere *post factum* consolation—it is the declaration of what took place on Golgotha and continues in us today. It is more than a mere accident of reality, it is something in which the three worlds are all deeply involved. The same could be said in relation, for example, to the Vedic sacrifice.

What I suggest is a rediscovery of the central position and function of worship as an integral human activity through which man is able to approach the transcendent, discover the value of life, and contribute to the construction, reconstruction, redemption, or re-creation of the world. Worship is not an escape, through the pretext of celebration, from human affairs. True liturgy is not a balm to soothe man's ailments, or a convenient psychological channel for draining away all our violent tendencies, frustrations, and unfulfilled desires. Rituals might very well perform this function of restoring psycho-physical balance. Modern man, in fact, is now beginning to find out that the ancient religions were not, after all, so very "primitive" with their continual rituals and celebrations. Ritual was the way to give form to the *humanum* and channel the needs of man. But, I repeat, all this is secondary. It is no more than the consequence of the nature and the very function of ritual. If it were celebrated only for its beneficial sociological or psychological effects it would be both unauthentic and ineffective. In saying this I am attempting to overcome a closed and narrow concept of the ritual, which we will come back to later.

The function of the ritual cannot be restored if we lose sight of its central claim to the configuration of the life of man and that of the entire cosmos. *Lokasamgraha*, the conservation

<sup>10</sup> See *KathUVI.1*.

of the world, was a classic expression of Indian spirituality according to the *Bhagavad-gita*.<sup>11</sup> Ritual is neither rubrics, that is, ceremonies, nor *nigries*, that is, ideas, however important these two components may be; it is anthropogenesis, or better, *cosmotheandrogenesis*, the co-operation of man with the world and with the gods in the genesis and maintenance of total reality. Man must reform himself and, in a certain sense, all reality through this integral action in which all his potential is involved. The ritual is the orthopraxy through which man contributes to maintaining the whole of reality. Any reduction of its significance not only minimizes the ritual but deforms its meaning. "Cosmic liturgy" is originally not a modern term but a revered and traditional expression of the forefathers of the church.<sup>12</sup> A cathedral or a temple is not built for personal satisfaction or that of a chosen few. Each individual sanctuary represents the entire universe, and the action performed within it concerns the progress of the whole cosmos; it is the place where gods, men, and the world meet so that each may do what they must to prevent this reality from plummeting into chaos and oblivion. Every temple is a constituent of total reality, a place of co-operation with the laws that govern real life. Perhaps the situation in the world today appears so dark because of the absenteeism of many from the *House of God and the People*. Gods alone are as powerless as Men alone without the collaboration of the Divine and the participation of Matter. The reconstruction of the body of the divine is a commonplace in Indian spirituality,<sup>13</sup> as is the edification of the body of Christ in biblical Christianity,<sup>14</sup> as long as God is all in all.<sup>15</sup> "Sacrifice is Man,"<sup>16</sup> said the *Satapatha-brāhmaṇa*, centuries before the sacrificial liturgical words of Pilate: "Ecce homo!"<sup>17</sup>

The ancient liturgies were not designed to bring comfort or rest to man so that he might work better, but exactly the opposite: man worked to build the cathedral, but lived to celebrate creation. Liturgy is not a mere appendix of man's life, just as the churches of Christian Europe were not built in just any vacant corner of the city. If today we find ourselves facing a crisis, it has nothing to do with the techniques of worship or the methods of celebration—it is a crisis of life itself. If the altar is not the center of the world, there is little sense in liturgical revival.

We should not, of course, underestimate the dangers of unrestrained clericalism, fatalism, and totalitarianism, or those of superstition and dictatorships of any kind. The signs of our times seem, however, to be proclaiming loudly that, without an integration of life, individual and collective schizophrenia can crush and destroy the human race itself. The problem of worship must be faced on this level. Everything else undermines the question and becomes no more than ritualistic entertainment.

If we seek to direct our lives as devotional beings, we might ask the American Indian tradition what the purpose is of the Sun Dance—or Indian theology the meaning of *lila*, the whole creation conceived as a game by and for the Lord. We might ask the Christian tradition why it focuses the full meaning of life and cosmic existence on the Eucharist. We can

<sup>11</sup> See *BG* III.25.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar on Maximus the Confessor, *Kosmische Liturgie* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1961).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the many writings translated in my work *The Vedic Experience: Mantramaṇjari—An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration* (Berkeley-London 1977; Pondicherry 1983; Delhi 1989, 1994, 1997, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Eph 4:12, etc.

<sup>15</sup> See 1 Cor 15:28.

<sup>16</sup> *SB* I.3.2.1.

<sup>17</sup> Jn 19:5.

meditate on Buddhist illumination for the liberation of the three worlds, or we can reflect on socialistic man, who concentrates all his public and private efforts to build a more humane society. To be explicit, moreover, we might have questioned the economists and politicians at Bretton Woods, in July 1944, in those distressing circumstances in which the outcome of the Second World War was already clear and those responsible began to face the problem not of how to win a battle but of how to rebuild a world, and set about creating institutions for the purpose. Through our questions we would discover that it was all part of a great secular ritual prompted by a reaction against the total profanation of humankind to the advantage of the elect race proclaimed by Nazi ideology.

In saying this, as I pointed out earlier, I may be extending the concept of ritual to include human activities that, in the Western world, are not and have not normally been considered as rituals, such as services (medical, political, intellectual, and so on), affective relationships (filial, spousal, friendships, and so on), artistic expression in all fields, and so on. All these activities may also contribute to upholding the world and be true to the description of ritual we have given. And I would venture to say, in fact, that these secular actions should also be regarded as possible ritual activities.

Three observations are relevant here. First, for the purpose of learning the meaning of a word we may, *a priori*, depart from our previous understanding of the meaning in its usual context. In this case, of course, I am extrapolating from the use of the word *ritual* to cover all the activities given above. We could also, however, proceed with an *a posteriori* analysis of the function of a thing or the implications of a word in order to obtain an understanding that may also be applied beyond our cultural sphere and our particular dialect. In such case, I would be justified in defining as *ritual* the many secular activities carried out in the unshakable conviction that they fulfill the same function as ancient rituals. I do not claim that any type of secular activity is automatically a ritual. What I am saying is that the secular is not opposed to the sacred (as is the profane) and that ritual, being a human existential, varies with the human process.

Second, religious historians, anthropologists, and other scholars are so used to analyzing sacred rituals and studying them in the context of past or remote cultures only that they are reluctant to consider the possibility of secular rituals and a modern society laden with ritual celebrations. This does not mean that every modern ritual is genuine, or likewise that any ancient ritual is acceptable. Perhaps vertical transcendence, which the latter tends to overemphasize, may be corrected and completed by horizontal transcendence, which the former tends to accentuate.

Third, I am not adulterating the meaning of the ritual but rather restoring perspective to the fact that, in traditional language, whatever we do is done for the glory of God, that whatever we undertake is for something more than ourselves and that we recognize the existence of the mystery in all human activities. Not every affective relationship, not every medical service or every work of art is automatically a ritual (nothing, in fact, is automatically a ritual), but only those actions that in some way or another transcend the intention of personal usefulness or egotistical pleasure and aim to contribute to the well-being of the world. The sincere blessing of a meal may become a real symbol of community, comradeship, and communion. The cathedral (of Cologne) was built by both the stonemason and the architect, as the famous anecdote says.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> "What are you doing?" asked the master to three stonemasons working on a building site. "Can't you see?" answered the first; "I'm cutting stone with the sweat of my brow." "I am working to earn my family's keep," replied the second. "I am building a cathedral," was the third reply.

*The Point of Arrival: A Contemporary Religious Attitude*

Until fairly recently Christian religious life, Christian ritual, appeared (and still does in many places) as a curious and peculiar combination of the old and the new.

Old: Many populations perform a series of somewhat anachronistic acts: days of abstinence once a week, ritual water for initiation, oil for the sick, and above all, the reenactment (even bloodless) of the blood sacrifice. Many populations kneel before statues and monstrances, kiss sacred objects and the hands of their priests, place incense and candles before paintings of saints or deities, clothe their ministers in ancient robes, form processions, go on pilgrimages, venerate sacred places and icons, formulate prayers for every possible human activity, make vows, follow their own calendars, form their own religious brotherhoods or groups, and so on.

New: Modern-day believers are not only present in all activities of political, educational, scientific, and industrial life, but they have also become leaders who are completely involved in achieving merely temporal goals. They live, smoke, and dress like others, they do not appear to have any special personal moral code, they have made such subtle and sophisticated distinctions in their doctrines and practices in the course of the centuries that their God is barely defined; their so-called sacrifice does not appear as such; their sacraments seem to be merely occasions for social gatherings, their meetings are lacking *disciplina arcana*, open to all and without a language of their own, and their relationships are generally the same as those of normal citizens. They may be in favor of peace, but they pay taxes for armaments and make profits by investing in construction or commerce; they may protest against divorce, abortion, and euthanasia, but they quickly tend to virtually abandon all resistance and accept the spirit of the times like their contemporaries. Once antiliberal par excellence, they have now become the true liberals with regard to the sin of consumerism.

It is not surprising that there is life and tension, but also disorientation and crisis, within many communities.

It is obvious that there is a historical reason behind these tensions. The so-called believers are also the product of their age. When slavery was accepted, the majority of Christians allowed it; when sexual discrimination and wars were a reality, few condemned them; when religion took on ascetic or monastic forms, the believers followed the same rules. And yet the saints and prophets—those who came before and those who came after other groups—have not ceased to urge Christians to pursue higher priorities. They have always felt the tension of not being of this world and yet being in it. And so, if this idea reaches its extreme consequences it will probably produce the "I die because I do not die" effect of certain mystics, or declared schizophrenia, which is repressed only when one ceases to be logically consequent. How can one follow a sacred vocation in a profane world? Ritual may provide the answer. The ritual is celebrated in this world and is wholly ritual with its worldly components, yet it is not of this world. It represents a sort of response to a higher petition, participation in a transcendent sphere, vocation, destination, vision, or however we choose to call it.

My thesis is relatively simple to formulate, though it is much more difficult to develop. It regards the very central character of the ritual and its importance in the life of a living tradition. In a pluralist world, it is not so much a problem of doctrinal orthodoxy as of ritual orthopraxy. *Mutatis mutandis*, the question regards humanity in general, which should not place too much emphasis on seeking monolithic doctrinal unity, neither a common opinion regarding fundamental matters, since, to begin with, determining what is and what is not fundamental is a problem in itself. In other words, people are not united by common opinions but by common goals. To have religion you need neither an ideology nor a "revelation." Human unity is, rather, an existential, which is expressed in ritual actions rather than ideas.

The various religions react positively when faced with a group of symbols because they are central to their life and celebrate the cosmotheandric liturgy surrounding the mystery; they reactivate the mystery of existence, of death and life. The basic problem does not lie in discussing possible interpretations, but in the continuity of what symbols mean.

I take it as accepted that all that exists in human life is not *logos*. I suspect that most of the "theology" of the last thousand years of Christian history has fallen into the cryptoheresy of subordinationism; the Spirit has been subordinated to *logos*, the Word has taken the upper hand (language, reason, intelligibility), eclipsing the Spirit (and eclipsing, I would add, "gesture," "life," and "experience").

It would be excessive to attempt to deal here with these enormous problems. I will limit myself, therefore, to giving a few incomplete indications regarding ritual in preparation for our central theme of the relationship between worship and secularity.

### *Nine Sūtras*

#### *Ritual Is Symbolic Rather Than Doctrinal*

Any discussion on ritual should avoid getting caught in the mirage of intellectual interpretations. Every ritual, as a symbolic act, is polysemic by nature. Even though we have the right to seek the philosophical conjectures of a given ritual, its existence and its function are only slightly connected with their intellectual backup. Theological discussions on transubstantiation, for example, have very little to do with the devotional celebration of the Eucharist. This has an existential reality and a function that do not depend totally on the theological hypothesis, whatever it may be, which seeks to render it intelligible. Rituals have a life of their own. They produce knowledge before they themselves are produced by the same knowledge, as St. Thomas Aquinas pointed out.

In contrast with intellectual understanding, the symbolic experience may be supported and completed with an *om* or an *amen*, a *darsan* or some kind of human *assistance*. Even admitting that the ancient innocence was better, the movement is irreversible and it would be immoral to prevent it. A single *amen* may have more entitative power in a Jewish, Greek, or Latin ritual than a dozen intellectual acts, but it loses all its meaning when one desires to know why it is said but cannot find the answer. With all its shades of meaning in a Scholastic context, a ritual is first of all an *actus hominis*, inseparable from an *actus humanus*.

#### *Ritual Cannot Be Consciously or Voluntarily Created, and if It Is Manipulated It Degenerates into Ritualism*

Every rite has its own *ontonony*, an inner cohesion and a structure that make it independent from any *heteronomous* imposition. The rite has its roots in the archaic prehistory of man: it is an expression of something that belongs to the human race. We could, of course, provide a theological, mythical, or mystical explanation for this, but it would be the same thing. Whether it be conveyed by a god or the emissary of a god, whether it be the product of the most profound archetypes of the unconscious or the fruit of a myth, every authentic ritual transcends the will of the individual and resists the dictates of an extraneous god; it has its own *ontonony*. Man may stop drinking *soma* or eating the body of Christ, but it is not so easy to abolish every rite centered on eating or the symbolic power of food. The rite is essentially a partaking, a sharing in something greater than ourselves, and any manipulative intervention in this petition from which the *raison d'être* of the rite derives would auto-

matically transform it into magic, even though it may continue to be genuine for those who perceive no manipulation. The rite assumes the existence of faith. If a dog were to eat the consecrated host, St. Thomas Aquinas tells us, it would not be receiving the body of Christ.

### *Rituals Arise When a Group of Favorable Circumstances Is Formed*

If rituals are the integrating forms of man's journey toward transcendence, the birth of a new rite—both because it represents a new goal and because it answers a new call from beyond (or however this may be perceived)—is a natural process. As a result of an opening up of the Mystery, or to the Mystery, new forms of ritual action may arise. Generally speaking, these rites are born as corrections or modifications of ancient rites.

It might be affirmed, for example, that giving thanks is a fundamental human attitude. Man feels the need to respond with gratitude to the experience of what is given freely and discovers that what is given is not the ultimate gift, causing him to open up to something beyond. This gratitude, therefore, may take on as many forms as the means of expression we find to manifest them—and we only genuinely express ourselves in response to that which affects us. Everything depends on how open we are to these impressions and how free and genuine our expressions are.

The origin of the Eucharist offers a clear paradigm. Jesus did not plan anything. He desired to celebrate what he predicted would be his last Passover supper with his disciples; he was troubled in the face of death, he had no other way out, and having loved his "friends" until the "end," he completed the Jewish commemoration of deliverance by sacrificing his own life, symbolized in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the wine.

### *Rejecting a Rite Because We Do Not Understand Its Meaning Is as Unacceptable as Preserving It Because We Do*

Only the innocence of the myth in which we are living can open the door to the world of ritual. To confuse this with a rational manifestation of the sacred would be to minimize the nature of man and warp the nature of the sacred. A rite is not the transferring of the action to an intellectual content; it is not the staging of a "script" but, rather, the performing of a given group of actions that may also follow the celebration itself, according to a pre-established schema, and even be placed in certain rubrics. Wishing a friend "Good morning" or "Happy birthday" may be as much of a ritual as "*el buen día nos dé Dios*"; or as a *bārak*, a blessing that expresses my sincerest wishes, which I myself am only able to transmit through a ritual greeting or blessing. Neither do I fully comprehend what I am doing. I know that I am blessing, that I am blessing a friend, that friendship is unfathomable and that my wishes are infinite. Every rite comes before its interpretation: "*Am Anfang war die Tat.*"<sup>19</sup>

Ritual has meaning, yet it does not necessarily have to reveal its meaning. It has an intention, it sets us in a certain direction and we perceive it, but no rite can be fully understood without being destroyed. If we could explain a ritual we would destroy it. If we could discover its meaning, this meaning would be more powerful than the ritual itself, making it obsolete. The wise man who knows the meaning of sacrifice, says an *Upaniṣad*, will not light the fire. There is no sacrament in heaven. This is the danger of all Gnostic spiritualism for which *tantra* and the resurrection of the flesh are bold remedies. If the flesh is resurrected, there will be rituals even in the New Earth, as the book of Revelation tells us.

<sup>19</sup> "In the beginning was action" (Goethe).

*Celebrating a Ritual Involves Consciously Succumbing to Its Charm*

I say "consciously," which implies "freely," rather than "willingly," to avoid the forced attitude of wanting to "willingly" accept a rite. I defend neither blind submission to tradition nor rebellion against it. Our relationship with a living ritual is something given and freely received, but not to the extent that it can be controlled at will—which would be the beginning of magic. Western scientific civilization is not accustomed to dealing with such "existentials," and we often lack not only methods of clarification but also means of expression.

We accept a ritual not because it has always been ordained or transmitted that we do so, but because we perceive its attraction. We partake of its dynamism—and it is not enough, obviously, to sit and think about it; we have to take part in the dance, the prayer, the action—the rite. Mere epistemology cannot help us to understand a rite: we have to experience it. We must actually *be there*, free and fully present, with open minds and hearts, for the rite to be real to us. And it is not a question of irrationalism or voluntarism, but rather acknowledgment of the fact that we are not only intellect. It involves, moreover, being aware of the very foundation of our intellect, the *skambha* or supporting pillar on which our understanding rests.

*Without Ritual There Is No Living Tradition*

What makes a *tradition* is not the continuity of its ideas, which change, sometimes considerably, but the ritual handing down from generation to generation and transmitting from place to place of the values, treasures, secrets, and legends—the mystery of that particular tradition. The origin of the word tradition is *tradere* (from *trans-dare*), which means to hand over something that is greater than ourselves, that transcends us and that cannot be managed or fulfilled by us alone, and this is why we transmit it. Without ritual a population, civilization, or religion cannot exist; we cannot enjoy that continuity that presumes something more than physical proximity or intellectual approval. No monarchy, republic, corporation, or family can continue in space and time without an act that renews the transmission of power, life, or myth. There must be something like water, prayer, the laying on of hands, fire, or the Holy Spirit for continuity to be established. If Israel wants to survive, either Esau or Jacob must receive the blessing. We may discuss the essence or meaning of priesthood, but such can only be transmitted through a ritual act. Is not modern education a form of ritual when its purpose is truly to transmit and increase the wealth, information, and arts of a given civilization? The genuine transmission of culture is a ritual act, and not a mere intellectual exercise.

*There Is No Reason Why the Sacred Character Inherent to Every Ritual Should Be Detrimental to Its Secularity*

Living rituals have always been close to human life. They are by no means profane acts, although they are generally secular, as the celebrations that accompany them still demonstrate today. Rituals are usually public, festive, and integrated in the everyday life of the people. The wedding is a festivity, ordination and baptism are public celebrations, and the funeral is frequently followed by a banquet. Christian liturgies are, by rights, celebrated in the context of a holy day or period. The proliferation of private masses was an example of the abandoning of the secular and sociological aspects of the ritual.

The urgent need today in a Christian context is, for example, to turn the consecrated bread into real bread, liturgical peace into political peace, the worship of the Creator into respect for creation, the praying Christian community into a genuine human fraternity.

Celebrating the Eucharist is a responsibility. We may find that we are obliged to leave it unfinished and go first to minister to the poor, or conclude it in the town hall, the jail or the ghetto, or by taking part in the many processions held in honor of the saints named Justice, Peace, Indiscrimination, Tolerance, Food, Simplicity, Mary, and so on.

In short, man is a ritual being, since it is through ritual that he reaches the ultimate purpose of his existence: to be so fully man, to be so pure as to become a pure nullity or, simply, to become happy, to feel saved and free . . . to become God.

The ritual is naturally action, *praxis, karman*, which requires participation and involvement, but it is an orthopraxy motivated by devotion, love, *bhakti*, and steeped in knowledge, awareness, *jñāna*, wisdom. Marginal rituals and peripheral cults, if they lose contact with the center, are as inadequate as scientific ideas or romantic ideas. The act of worship, in the sense of adoration, *latrīa*, is essential to the human being, representing his dynamic drive toward the Mystery.

The primordial ritual we are seeking must recompose all the fragments of our universe.

*The Secular Nature of the Rite Demands  
That We Believe in Its Meaning*

The genuine rite is neither exclusively objective nor merely subjective. Expressed in traditional Christian terms, we could say that the *opus operatum* (the intrinsic action of the sacrament) is *opus operantis Dei* (the action of a power superior to the human being), which is generally produced through faith (*cum fundamento in re*, according to Christian nomenclature itself). The effectiveness of the rite, however, is not that of "efficient causality"—which would be idolatry.

*The Rite Demands Compliance with Its Rules,  
Yet It Does Not Depend on Them*

The rite is effective, yet its effectiveness is not automatic. The same "canon law" distinguishes the validity and the legitimacy of a rite. *Grace* is another mysterious word used by several traditions. Grace sets certain conditions, but these are not the cause of its effectiveness. Obedience to the rules of the rite is also not indispensable. The word "grace" that we have mentioned connotes freedom.

## WORSHIP AND SECULARITY

Having outlined the general problem of worship and several of its anthropological aspects, let us now tackle the specific question of the meaning of worship to secular man.

### The Problem

No mathematician would attempt to solve a linear equation with three unknowns. Theologians rarely agree on the actual definition of *worship* (in the New Testament alone there are over thirty different expressions of the concept), while philosophers are endlessly discussing the meaning of *secularity*, and even more so, its value. And here we wish to relate these two factors, which are already problematic in themselves, with the aim of developing the even more fragile concept of *secularity and worship*. Life, however, is not ruled with mathematical laws, and perhaps the effort of explaining *z* might help us to discover a more exact value for *x* and *y*.

The possibility of such an undertaking is essentially based on the fact that all things in this world are interrelated and that living beings themselves are no more than relationships. If this be so, the study of a particular relationship may throw light on the two words that are almost at the point of perishing for having been separated and considered as being incompatible.

Only worship can prevent secularity from becoming something inhuman, and only the latter can save worship from meaninglessness.

If *worship* possesses a value that is universal and not merely bound to a particular form of devotion or religion—if, in other words, it is a constitutive human dimension—it must also have meaning for a secularized civilization. This is the meaning we must find, or go back to elaborating, if necessary.

If *secularity*, for better or worse, exists as a historical situation (at least for a large segment of humanity) it must necessarily confront one of the most widespread cultural phenomena of all times: worship.

To put it briefly, today the encounter and possible conflict between these two factors is inevitable.

We must be aware of the risk involved in this encounter and dialogue: that the theology of worship may seek to eliminate or excommunicate secularity, regarding it as the major evil that threatens man, or that secularism attempt to do away with worship as the residue of an age that is dead and buried. Yet I repeat, this dialogue is vital and, consequently, extremely risky for both parties.

Since this problem is so vast, however, I shall examine just a few of the aspects regarding the question of the relationship between the two words.

We focus on the problem from three different perspectives. The first is *methodological*. This shows us that a merely pragmatic approach is basically insufficient in this case, and that

we must discover, in what we have called "the symbolic difference," the criteria that must be applied if we are to do justice to the problem itself. In so doing, however, the nature of our problem will lead us to understand that a vital question (such as that of worship in a secular age) cannot be "planned" or postulated by any purely rational method. We must give room to the Spirit, allowing growth and inspiration. The sphere of freedom must be truly free, and no amount of philosophical or theological speculation, however necessary it may be, is enough to explain or uphold a spontaneous and vital human situation.

The *second perspective* (chapter 17) is *philosophical*. With the aid of a more universal schema, which we consider not only valid but also effective and that violates neither the facts nor the theories, we attempt to apply a certain clarity to the general problem of worship, based on the information gathered from the history of religions. We do not, however, dwell on details. The anthropological and philosophical categories of heteronomy, autonomy, and ontonomy help us, in chapter 17, to lay the foundations for a possible theology of worship in a secular age.

The *third perspective* (chapter 18) is *theological*, taking the term "theology" in a broad and universal sense. We focus mainly on the Western and Christian retrospective, since it is in this historical and geographical area that the problem is exacerbated the most. In this chapter we develop the principle of "complementarity" with its corollary of "universality and tangibility." These categories help us to understand and show us a way that may well bring us to a fruitful balance between theory and practice. In the last section of chapter 18 we attempt to develop the various structures in which authentic worship could take shape and blossom in our age.

What gives unity to this study is basically our commitment in establishing an integral anthropology. It is an attempt to demonstrate the liturgical nature of man, while showing that worship is an essential human dimension. At the same time, we recognize that secularity is an important phenomenon of our century, a phenomenon that, from now on, is destined to accompany the growth of human consciousness.

Today, those who are not open to secularity cannot hope to fully realize their humanity, at least not according to the needs of our century. On the other hand, it is not possible for man to exist without worship. These two elements, however, *secularity* and *worship*, have been regarded as totally incompatible. Our aim is to consider their reconciliation without offering a general theory but seeking, rather, to clarify the tangible (and, therefore, more universal) aspects of the problem.

This anthropological basis is also the reason we concentrate less on the sociological aspects of the question. Not because we consider them irrelevant, but rather because we regard the social aspect of man as an integral part of the human being as a person. Throughout this essay we maintain the basic distinction between the individual and the person.

While "individual" is contraposed to "society," "person" is not. It is easy to understand that, as a reaction to the individualistic attitude adopted in the face of a great many problems, contemporary writers tend to emphasize the sociological factors involved. This dichotomy between individual and society, however, is not necessary from the standpoint of integral anthropology, which considers man not as an individual but as a person, and contemplates society not as a group of individuals but as the natural and personal field of human interaction.

An individual is a practical, pragmatic, and artificial abstraction. The concept of "individual" appears when we have interrupted the vital relationships of a human being and reduced him to something that can be grasped and manipulated, to a body, or what some cultures would call the *mere body*. A person, on the other hand, does not end at his fingertips and cannot be reduced to mere brute matter. A person is real, alive, and present in a collection

of relationships that intersect at a given center, which we may call *personality* (but which is by no means synonymous with *person*). An individual may have a number and even a weight, but a person cannot.<sup>1</sup>

An individual is a separate entity, which maintains an intrinsic or democratic relationship with society, while person and society are not antagonistic. Each person is society and must be attributed the complete range of personal pronouns.

Nevertheless, when we speak of worship and relate it to the human person, we must bear in mind that we are not defending an individualistic idea of worship and we are not presenting a merely collectivistic notion. Worship is a human value and, as such, a personal value; consequently, it cannot be considered either as a purely individual or an exclusively collective phenomenon.

This essay also aims to provide a contribution to the comparative study of religions, in the sense not of a "confrontation of religions" but, rather, the clarification of one or several religious problems, with the aid of a number of religious traditions. At the same time, I do not deny that a certain way of regarding a problem is itself part of the same problem.

The extremely concise nature of this study will justify and, I hope, excuse the almost total lack of notes and references.

### Worship

The equivalent of the English word *worship* is not easily found in other European languages. *Cult* is perhaps its most appropriate synonym. All the other words of Latin or German origin have a much narrower meaning.

The term *worship* is extremely broad and includes a certain number of actions that today probably mean little to us. Thus, while prayer and meditation have retained their importance, other worship, such as propitiation or supplication, have lost a large part of their primitive meaning.

Etymologically the word comes from *weorp*, or "worth," in the sense of esteem, honor. From here it took on the meanings of importance, respect, dignity (cf. the German *Würde*). Since its origins the word has always had religious connotations: veneration of a force considered divine, reverence toward a superior being, adoration, and so on. It is significant that the etymological (and probably earliest) meaning of *worth* is "economic value"—the price of something. We express our respect for someone, therefore, or pay them reverent homage because we have discovered that for us the object of our worship holds value.

Many definitions of *worship* have been offered, yet this word is actually a general term that covers over a dozen quite different human attitudes.

Since our intention here is not to analyze the various forms of worship, we will merely point out the meaning of general terms like *rite*, *service*, *religion*, *mercy*, and *piety*, along with more specific terms such as *sacrifice*, *prayer*, *adoration*, *reverence*, *devotion*, *invocation*, *aspiration*, *homage*, *supplication*, *rogation*, *intercession*, *prayer*, *petition*, *oblation*, *libation*, *thanksgiving*, *praise*, *veneration*, *consecration*, *anointing*, *impetration*, *meditation*, *surrender*, *contemplation* and *love*. So as not to forget the complexity of our subject we should also bear in mind that, according to Scholastic theology, the sacrifice of Mass with its four elements—Communion, sacrifice, Eucharist, and memorial—has five effects, which are

<sup>1</sup> See my article "Singularity and Individuality: The Double Principle of Individuation," in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 29, no. 111–112 (1975): 141–66, in which I attempt to show that the uniqueness of the human being is radically different from the singularity of material entities.

adoration (*latreia*), thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), prayer (*impetratio*), forgiveness (*propitatio*), and satisfaction (*satisfactio*).

For the word *worship* to include all this group of phenomena it is clearly a very broad concept. However, if we look briefly at the terms listed above we can see that they all have practically the same basic structure: a personal act through which the person comes into contact with something or someone transcendent and superior in order to give or receive something material or spiritual.

In an attempt to sum up widely different opinions and views, I would venture to define *worship* as the *ultimate expression of a belief*. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that worship is *every human action that symbolizes a belief*. To be even more precise, in fact, I would qualify worship as *every symbolic act resulting from a particular belief*.

The word *expression* is intended here as meaning an *action* performed by the person engaged in worship. Now, if the act symbolizing belief is considered an act of the intellect, worship will take on an intellectual form and, in this way, will be related to acts of concentration, meditation, gratitude, sincerity, and suchlike. If the symbolic act is of the will or the heart, then worship will be associated with such acts as devotion, surrender, love, and praise. If man's actions are regarded as the most sincere expression of his beliefs, then worship will be manifested in festivities, celebrations, dance, and so on. But if, on the other hand, the highest value is attributed to man's constructive actions performed out of love for his fellows, then worship will be associated with the idea of service, work, and duty.

Again, if it is considered that a belief can only be fully expressed collectively, then worship will be regarded essentially as a communal action. But if, on the other hand, the expression of a belief is regarded as a deep, personal experience, then worship will take the form of an inner act.

Likewise, if a belief is considered as only being fully expressed through a particular type of testimony, then this testimony will be the most sublime form of religious worship. Martyrdom, for example, was considered the perfect form of worship.

Not every action is an act of worship, but only those considered as the ultimate expressions of a belief, that is, as manifestations of religion—if we agree that religion is the “home” of belief.

Worship is a *symbolic act*; it is not a purely private act that expresses the psychological or subjective intention of the worshiper, nor is it an exclusively objective action that contains merely noetically that which it expresses.

A symbolic act is an act that transcends its immediate action; it contains, that is, an intention that goes beyond the persons involved. This is like saying that worship is a sacrament in the broadest sense of the word, a symbolic act with special importance—a special *glory*, we might add, bearing in mind that the Hebrew word *kabbod* means both “importance” and “glory.”

Worship is an act that expresses a *belief*. I use the word *belief* in the sense of religious belief, leaving aside the question of whether there is, in fact, such a thing as nonreligious belief. By *belief*, I mean a particular “crystallization” of faith, a particular human response to faith and, consequently (given that man is a thinking being), a certain intellectual formulation of faith, a collection of basic principles in which a given religion intends to incarnate its message. Beliefs reach beyond the words they express; yet, at the same time, they are not independent from them. As far as *faith* is concerned, I consider it a universal phenomenon, a constitutive dimension of man and, I would add, his existential gateway to the Mystery—assuming we agree, that is, that this latter notion does not need to be interpreted from a purely ontological point of view. While faith is a human dimension, it allows no plurality whatsoever. The *act of faith* is a response of the human being to faith. And since the human person is an intelligent being, this act will have a predominantly intellectual dimension. The specific *act* through

which man responds to his faith is that which is called *belief*. There is only one faith, just as there is only one reason; nevertheless, there are as many beliefs as there are philosophical systems, since these are constructions of reason that have the purpose of accounting for reality and our situation within it. Ultimately, belief is personal and faith is anthropological.

Summing up: every act of worship is an act of faith, that is, the expression of a belief (leaving open the question of whether all expressions of faith may be considered acts of worship).

### Secularity

The concept of secularity is also polysemic and ambiguous. To discover its basic unity we will look at the various uses and translations of the word, which is probably of Etruscan origin and resembles the Latin *sero*, *serare*, or "to sow, plant, generate, disperse." From here it took on the meaning of "generation" and, consequently, "phase" or period. The *saeculum* is not simply the world or the *kosmos* but, rather, its temporal aspect: *aion*. Each translation, however, carries a certain variation of meaning. As we know, *aion* means a stretch of time lived, a period of life (cf. Sanskrit *ayus* and its many compounds with the same meaning of period of life). Ever since Parmenides, however, it has been used in philosophical language to express the specific form of existence of beings, keeping open the great philosophical controversy on whether this "temporal" form of existence is a part of being or merely refers to becoming. The Hebrew word *olam* also means "time" and "world" or, more specifically, "temporal world."

*Secular*, therefore, indicates the temporal world, the temporal aspect of reality. The various meanings and evaluations of *secular* would depend, then, on one's particular concept of time.

If we consider that the temporal aspect of reality has a negative connotation, *saeculum* will mean the so-called secular world as opposed to the sacred world, this latter being regarded as the true, important, and real world. The secular is temporal. The temporal, therefore, is the transitory, that which is not eternal and, consequently, is not worth the full concentration of our efforts. Accordingly, secularity will be the process by which the temporal penetrates the sphere of the sacred, the mystic, of religious values (taking these terms to mean the permanent and, therefore, the intemporal).

If, on the other hand, we consider the temporal as having a positive connotation, *saeculum* becomes a symbol of recovery, the taking possession of the sphere of reality, which is so often monopolized by the sacred and the religious. Secularity, therefore, will be the liberation of humanity from the clutches of obscurantism; secular man will be the complete human being who accepts his responsibilities; the secular condition will consist in a community of human life that transcends the sectarian ways of the different religions. Secularity will be the ideal condition of humanity.

In short, the advent of secularity is closely related to the increasing importance given to time and the temporal.

For our purposes, it is sufficient to consider secularity as a process that is repeatedly manifested in almost all cultures and that has come to represent a profound and central aspect of the cultural situation in the West and the Westernizing world. In actual fact, under modern secularity the sphere of the sacred, which is identified with the intemporal, is increasingly reduced and even tends to disappear completely in some areas.

While the secular has been identified with the temporal and evaluated differently, according to the evaluation of temporal reality, the sacred, as synonymous with nonsecular, has traditionally been identified with the intemporal, in the positive sense of the word. Now, paradoxically, what emerges today (and what may be a *hapax phainomenon*, a unique event

in the history of humanity) is not secularism but the sacred character of secularity. In other words, what would seem to be unique in the human constellation of the present-day *kairōs* is the breaking of the equation "sacred = intemporal" along with the positive value that it has so far held. The temporal is regarded today as positive and, in a certain sense, sacred. Secular man is not necessarily antireligious or profane just because he upholds the positive and, in a way, sacred value of time and temporal reality.

In short, the process of secularity corresponds to that degree of human consciousness that discovers the positive and, at the same time, real character of time and temporal reality. The traditional attitudes toward time oscillate between experiencing the same as an entity that is real but has a merely secondary value (a means to reach the eternal) and experiencing it as an entity that is unreal, both as a negative value to be avoided and overcome, and as the only positive element of the human condition full of suffering and vanity (to say the least). Today a new attitude is emerging: that which considers time as both positive and definitive, good and final, not as a means that can be manipulated or a phase that must be overcome, but as an end in itself and the only real mode of existence. It is no coincidence that today the secular is only fully embraced by mystics. These understand, in fact, that eternity does not lie ahead and are able to experience the *tempiternal* nature of reality.

Leaving aside theological subtleties, the main patterns of man's attitude to time may be summed up as follows:

	unreal	negative: Hindū religions positive: Buddhism
time		
	real	negative: Semitic religions positive: Secular attitude

Here we have another version of the old metaphysical dilemma: either God is real, and the world, therefore, is not (since only God is real, the problem of evil, for example, may be solved at the cost of denying its ontological reality); or else God is not real, because the world is, and there is no duality. Secularization is the process by which "reality" penetrates the world, a process that consists in making the world real, which, depending on the interpretation of the word, means *sacred*, *divine*, or, on the contrary, *independent*, more itself, more the world, and, ultimately, real.<sup>2</sup>

Due to the peculiar nature of this study we do not pursue this question here, so as not to risk going off on a tangent.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See the epilogue of the book by J. E. Smith, *Experience and God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 480ff., in which the author studies what he calls the "five outstanding traits" of secularization, i.e., autonomy, technology, voluntarism (and individualism), temporalism, and "aestheticism," all traits deriving from the new attitude to time, or the conviction that temporal reality is real.

<sup>3</sup> See my study *La sécularisation de l'herméneutique. Le cas du Christ: Fils de l'Homme, Fils de Dieu*, in *Herméneutique de la sécularisation*, ed. E. Castelli (Paris: Aubier, 1976), 213–48. The whole book provides relevant reading.

## CRITERIA FOR AN ANSWER

*Methodological Considerations*

## Insufficient Criteria

There exists an attitude that, with the very best of intentions, attempts to tackle the problem from the point of view of pastoral theology or apologetics. I would call this attitude the "*translator mentality*": we have to translate, we are told. To move from the pulpit to the altar, from the Gregorian chant to modern jazz, from the sacred to the profane, from the tedious to the exciting, from clerical to lay, from the temple to the homes, and from specific doctrines to ecumenism.

It is true that these translators have accomplished an extraordinary task, and represent the precursors and creators of a much-needed reform. Many of the changes they have introduced are extremely valid and have prevented a number of congregations (and a number of churches) from collapsing under the crushing weight of mere habit. Adaptation to the needs of modernity on the part of Hindū and Muslim movements also offer many examples. It is not merely a question of translating from Sanskrit or Arabic, but also of translating for those living in the towns what was previously expressed in more rural and archaic terms.

I am not judging the value of these reforms. I am simply saying that (a) ultimately, this attitude is inadequate, and (b) this criterion is insufficient.

a. *Ultimately, this attitude is inadequate* because it is based on a pragmatic and superficial assumption: the ancient *apparati* do not work or, at least, no longer work today; consequently, we are trying out new procedures. This is clear not only from the examples above but also in the language used: find better ways of getting across the message, proclaim the treasure that has been placed in our care, reclothe, transpose, adapt, accommodate, and other similar phrases. Perhaps the most irritating expression of all is one that has even found its way into the highest ecclesiastical spheres: "experimental liturgies"—as if it were possible to carry out experiments on liturgy, as on laboratory mice, to see if it "works," or to "test" love to see if it satisfies us; as if the Christian sacrifice celebrated "experimentally" were a sort of "dry Mass" to test the reaction of the people . . . As if liturgy could be manipulated to such an extent.

Certainly, none of the people involved do this deliberately and all would agree with my criticisms, but this only confirms my fears. If we act unconsciously it is simply because we have taken for granted the very thing that should be critically examined and reconsidered: the very meaning and nature of worship, the content and not just the forms, the substance and not just the accidents, the real meaning and not just the connotations. Pragmatism is not necessarily negative, but in this case it is obviously insufficient.

This brings us to my second reason for rejecting the attitude of the translator.

b. *The criterion is insufficient* due to a lack of critical sense regarding the heart of the question. If worship is a problem in a secularized society, the main reason is not because liturgy has gone out of fashion or become boring, but because the very principles of liturgy are in crisis. Fashion and boredom are not the main issues; the main obstacle is our fear of a lack of meaning.

All too often theological reflection tackles this problem superficially, considering it mainly as a practical or pastoral question while it is essentially theological. I believe that today worship (or liturgy) represents the most important theological question of Christianity and, perhaps, of all religions. Is not worship religion *qua* religion in action? The fact that Christian organizations and churches are today so involved (very often also officially) in activities of a social, economic, and political nature, and so on—thus placing themselves in competition with parallel secular movements, so that all differences (and, therefore, all justification for repetition of the action) disappear—is due to the lack of an adequate theology of worship. The current situation may represent a perfectly comprehensible reaction to the excessive orientation of religions toward the other world and their traditional indifference in the face of secular problems. Weary of "asking of God" instead of simply acting, or "calling on divine mercy" rather than being merciful, or praising a remote and seemingly indifferent superior being rather than exalting and developing human potentials, many serious and responsible men of our time have found themselves compelled, in a Christian and religious spirit, to rid themselves of everything they consider to be mere antiquated museum pieces and have dedicated themselves to the immediate service of the world. We must face this problem in all its crudeness and not think that we have already dealt with it by censuring its eccentricities and exaggerations; I am convinced, moreover, that the question cannot be solved through compromise alone.

Today it is unlikely for someone to settle for a dualistic solution that says that both the one thing (sacred worship) and the other (secular action) must be put into action, that there is a time for everything, that work must respect worship and worship must not interfere with work. Martha and Mary were not strangers to each other; they were sisters and probably lived in the same house. After all, although Mary chose the best part, it was still only a *part*. Contemporary man desires all and not just a part. The Hebrew word '*abad*' means "work," "service," but it also means "worship." The entire secular then becomes sacred. But let us proceed in order.

Any criterion based solely on adaptation or simple tradition is, therefore, insufficient for the fact that it takes for granted something that lies at the very foundations of the problem and must be examined—the very meaning of worship as a sacred action compared to secular activity.

### Necessary Criteria

If the definition of *worship* given in the previous chapter is valid, we may use it as a benchmark for discerning whether the various forms of worship are genuine or not. That which does not express the ultimate belief of a person, community, or religion cannot be considered a genuine form of worship. In this case, a living ritual would be reduced to ritualism. When the act has ceased to be a vehicle for symbolism yet continues to be used as an act of worship, it is no longer real.

The idea of worship as a symbolic act is twice as important in relation to the process of secularization.

First, the process of secularization is essentially ambivalent, that is, it has a dual pattern. If secularization, in fact, involves changes in basic human symbols, on one hand it destroys

certain forms of worship, and on the other hand, it purifies it. If, in a given age and culture, the whole world had the same symbolic references, secularization might be considered as a healthy metabolic process by which a certain society eliminates certain obsolete cultural forms for the purpose of adopting new ones. In reality, however, society does not possess this homogeneousness, and consequently what to some may appear as a liberating process of healthy demystification to others is a pernicious example of the forces of evil undermining the natural order of things. Perhaps, in this case, tolerance (the sociological translation of the word *patience*) could be said to take on central importance.

The ambivalence appears even clearer if we take into consideration the twofold dynamism of the present-day world. On one hand, there is a process of universalization and even unification, which makes it more essential to respond to the need to find a truly universal and human form of worship. There is nothing that contemporary man hates more than esoterism and closed groups. On the other hand, there is the parallel tendency toward detail and the tangible; every human being desires to express himself, and this is only possible in a specific context and a well-defined environment. Liturgy, then, finds that it must become tangible and meaningful to each particular group, and is obliged to adopt forms of expression that can only be applied in a very specific context.

Second, the idea of worship as a symbolic act also explains why the latter persists even after it has ceased to be an expression of the belief of the individual. Since worship is a symbolic act and symbols possess a certain consistency in themselves on account of the symbolic aspect of reality, the fact that a certain act says nothing to a particular individual does not mean that the same act is incapable of transmitting or bearing this symbolic reality. In other words, the power of ritual expressions is so great, the driving capacity of symbolic actions is so compelling, that the ritual is sometimes able to transmit its message to future generations. The mechanical, but faithful, repetition of a given ritual by a meticulous priestly class has often been the only way to preserve a fundamental rite. We recall, for example, the faithfulness of the Roman Catholic liturgy during the eighteenth century or the conservatorism of certain priestly castes in India. This was the "providential" way of preserving the Christian sacrifice and the Vedic sacrifice, despite the fact that almost no one celebrated the symbolic acts of worship with the minimum of conscious awareness needed (according to the present-day meaning) to avoid being branded as superstitious. And once rituals—including those without content—are abandoned, then continuity is broken, as has happened in certain indigenous religions of America, Africa, and Australia—which are now striving to restore their lost rituals by consulting neighboring tribes and the books of anthropologists.

We must beware of iconoclastic outbursts that are too hurried and superficial. The subject of worship is not just an individual, a generation, or a particular group. Symbolic actions have a characteristic value in and of themselves, and while they are not completely independent from the human being (this would be pure magic), neither are they wholly dependent on a given group of people. The balance is delicate and difficult.

We have already mentioned the difference between sign and symbol. While the former is an epistemological expedient that indicates the "thing," the relationship between the symbol and the symbolized reality is *sui generis*. The symbol is neither a substitute for the "thing" nor the "thing" itself, but what it appears to be, how it manifests itself. This manifestation, however, is not that of an attribute or a certain effect of the "thing"; it is the primordial manifestation, its genuine epiphany, all that lies beyond or outside of which is nothing but mental postulation. I am the symbol of myself, and taking this expression in the sense not of the objective but of the subjective genitive, we might add that I am the symbol of that "I" that *is* and is manifested only in the symbol. Generalizing, we could say that being is the

symbol of itself as the person is the symbol of the ego. I "am" not my body and my face, but my body and my face are symbols of myself, my ego, which, outside the body and without a face, does not exist and is nothing. I cannot identify with my symbol—yet neither can I separate myself from it. In this sense, I am my symbol.

Bearing in mind the customary terminology that refers to *transcendental difference* or *ontological difference* (which Heidegger would call *transzendenhaft* as opposed to *transsensual*) as that which exists between beings (along with their entities) and Being, and bearing in mind the transcendent or theological difference between God and beings, I would like to introduce here the expression *symbolic difference* to indicate the difference existing between symbol and reality, that is, that peculiar difference between reality (which exists only to the extent in which it is included in its symbol) and its symbol. This difference is neither epistemological nor ontological; it is "symbolic." We cannot comprehend any being unless we also accept its symbol or, more precisely, unless we discover the symbol of that reality, which is revealed only in its own rightful symbol. The reality of the symbol is not found "behind" or "before" it, but is manifest only as a symbol. Ultimately, what reality *is* is its symbol; the *is* is the symbol of the real. The symbol is not purely objectifiable because it does not lie exclusively on the side of the object. It is precisely a symbol and not a concept, object, or "thing" because it also includes the subject of which it is a symbol. Yet neither is the symbol subjectifiable, or exclusively on the side of the subject. It is literally a symbol and not an idiosyncratic opinion, as it includes also the object of which it is a symbol. The symbol, as we mentioned earlier, is constituents a relationship; yet, strictly speaking, this definition is misleading, as it implies the same terminology that we are trying to overcome. The symbol is reality itself before it is split in the subject-object dichotomy and is the very foundation of this division. The symbol is original and, therefore, cannot be interpreted, because the interpretation would be, in that specific situation, the true symbol. Consequently, the symbol must always be personal—experienced and not interpreted. Strictly speaking, the expression *symbolic difference* represents another concession to dialectical thought, in that it is not so much a question of difference (a word that seems to give priority to the epistemological) as tension between the very poles of reality.

Nevertheless, the criterion for distinguishing between an authentic form and a fake form of worship cannot be the individualistic reaction of asking oneself, Does this mean something to me right now? It might be even more meaningful to others or to future generations. It is true that if an act does not transmit anything to me, it should be my duty to not perform it. Personally, I might find it meaningless to ceaselessly murmur *Kyrie eleison*, but this would not give me the right to condemn the repetition of this plea for mercy as an "abracadabra" or consider it as a residue of past ages. The persisting of the symbol is superior to its survival in the individual.

Yet, if this is so, are we not justifying the indefinite preservation of obsolete forms of worship? Certainly not. Cultures and forms of worship, like all human beings, are mortal, and we must adapt to their normal metabolism. On the other hand, a rigid application of democratic techniques in this field for the purpose of deciding what should be kept and what should be changed would lead to the negation not only of the entire religious tradition, the very reality of tradition, but also of the nature of worship itself, which is a personal and free act and not a mere act of collective submission to the majority for the sake of the pragmatic functioning of a community.

At this point, we find ourselves faced with the inevitable need of every faith and every religion (whether sacred or secular): the existence of the opposite pole, the other side, the trans-, supra-, or superhuman factor. However it may be called (God, Nothing,

Humanity, Future), there is always another mediation that transcends that of a purely individual nature.

Now, how can we know this criterion? This is the very *locus* of tradition as mediator with the power to decide what is and what is not the genuine expression of a faith. That which appears here as the sole agent capable of solving the dilemma, I would add, cannot be likened to any human authority or any quasi-magic or anthropomorphically conceived superhuman petition. The theandrical aspect emerges once again—but we shall refer to this briefly in the next section.

Let us now summarize our analysis of these methodological notes.

In setting about to discover what place worship has in a secular age, we cannot adopt a purely pragmatic attitude and repeat experiments to see whether something "works." We must examine the very nature of worship. Thus we will discover that it is the ultimate expression of a belief and, consequently, come to see that there are different types of worship for different types of belief.

Taking into account the cautions and reservations we have formulated, we come to the conclusion that, if we do not wish to fall into irrationality, the forms of worship cannot escape philosophical analysis. Philosophy (or, if we prefer, theology) has somewhat to contribute when it comes to examining acts of worship and analyzing their meaning and content. It may discover forms that do not symbolize reality; it may say, for example—with regard to the premises on which are founded the great penitential processions that were once celebrated to testify the people's fear of the wrath of a god who could only be appeased by the blood and suffering of his worshipers—that they are unfounded as they no longer reflect our idea of the divine. I should conclude, therefore, that such forms of worship would today be a distortion of faith rather than the genuine expression of an ultimate belief.

We may conclude, therefore, that while a purely rational and theoretic approach is necessary in rejecting false forms of worship, it is not enough to create or inspire positive forms. Another factor is needed—a factor to which we dedicate the third section of this methodological chapter.

### Faithfulness to the Spirit

Not even methodologically can life itself be compared to a contemplation of life, or the living expression of a belief to a rational manifestation of the same.

The theological criterion is necessary, but it is not enough. Human concern about the function and role of worship today cannot be reduced to a set of deductive theological theorems, or to profound philosophical considerations. Philosophers, theologians, or scholars cannot solve the vital problem of worship, much less impose decisions; it is a problem that does not belong primordially to the theoretical sphere.

Sometime ago I found myself explaining to three learned theologians—all experts on liturgical matters and, at the same time, deeply spiritual men (of different Christian churches)—certain forms of worship celebrated by a small group of Christians six thousand kilometers away, and just as far spiritually from the world of these three friends. As I carried on with my description I could not help but share the uneasiness of these men, and imagine the objections and misgivings that would spring to their minds. They were all men of experience and imagination, but I realized that, as we sat comfortably in a *trattoria* in the Trastevere district of Rome, my attempts to describe the efforts made to express and to live the Christian mysteries on the banks of the Ganges were doomed to failure. I do not say that those men of the church were wrong, but just that their comments (quite valid in themselves) could be

neither a positive and decisive element nor an inspirational force in expressing a Christian belief and giving form and life to a genuinely incarnated liturgy in India.

The *locus theologicus* for our problem is not the academy, nor is it the Vatican (neither theorists nor experts, neither philosophy nor theology), but the actual gathering together in a precise place, the voice of the Spirit that rises up above the din in the street, or in the solitude of one's own home or of the artist's (or even theologian's) study.

How is a given liturgy consolidated? We see examples every day. A liturgy is not established by decree; it is not born from contemplation or decision but from the instinct of the community, the resurgence of the Spirit, the force of circumstances, an inspired creative act, the spontaneity of the situation. We can only prepare the "canvas" on which the Spirit works at its own leisure, and in which superficiality, base instincts, and irrational forces do not prevail.

How, then, must we prepare the way for the Spirit? Is not this intention contradictory in itself? If we mean it in a voluntaristic sense, it certainly is—who am I to prepare a situation in which the Spirit may act? Freedom is not something that lends itself to advance decisions or manipulations. Yet our disposition may be one of listening, of humility, and of total acceptance and our attitude toward our age and generations may be of trust. I use the word *generations* because when one declines, the next is right at its heels. We may cultivate an attitude of openness toward not only the new but also the old. We may, in short, seek to free our spirit from its limitations and simply experience the meanings of the folly of the cross and the foolishness of wisdom. Both the extent and the quality of our belief may increase; thus we may be able to face the problem with that humility that is aware that all we can do is hope along the way and love for the entire length of the quest. It goes without saying that this listening to the voice of the Spirit is not incompatible with obedience (*ob-audire*) to the legitimate authorities.

Thus worship will not be merely following a traced path but creating it; it will not look back to the past, but "delve" into the future. In other words, it is not so much a function of the priest as a task for the prophet.

One last word regarding prophetic vocation. It is not good for a prophet to die outside his spiritual homeland, nor to die by the hand of those who are not his people. To be willing to give his life for his brothers without seeking to escape is the sign of a prophet. The prophet is the man who does not draw back nor abandon the community to avoid being contaminated by the sins of his brothers. Neither does he seek quietness out of a desire for a false peace. He knows that his life is his only strength, and continually places it on the line. By the simple law of probability, if he continues to raise his voice and risk his life he will eventually hit the right note, and then he will be given over to a violent death—or, sometimes, a peaceful death. Not all prophets seek a battle or risk execution, but every prophet has exposed his own life to danger without defending himself.

I am not exalting the prophet at the expense of the community. I am attempting to suggest that this phenomenon is part of the nature of things. It is characteristic of tradition (authority, community, church) to resist change, to put innovation to the test—but also to allow the prophet to complete his mission. The life of the community is only possible in a fight to the death between the priest and the prophet. It owes its very existence, in fact, to constant and repeated sacrifice. Today fair play is vindicated, but nevertheless both the priest and the prophet are fully aware that their struggle is to the death. From this death life is reborn. It is not for the prophet to decide what is right, nor to presume to build an exclusively prophetic community (which would defeat its own object), but to continue in his nonconformist and innovative vocation. The priest, on his part, should not condemn. He cannot stop tradition or suffocate life, but he must remain loyal to the structures and

faithful to the past. The community is the place of sacrifice, and this sacrifice of the priest and the prophet is also liturgy. Worship is not merely a sentimental chant; it is the renewal of the life of the community and humanity.

Worship is life, and life cannot be enforced or created by law. Every life, however, has a constant and universal connotation: it is animated and maintained by death. Life goes on because of the constant process of death and new life. The letter kills. What is important is not that we avoid death or hold onto what we imagine still possesses life, but that death is the starting point for resurrection.

We have said that a purely rational *a posteriori* criterion is not enough to identify the right place for worship and the ways in which it must move in a given age. We have also said that the rational *a priori* criteria that we may discover are undoubtedly necessary, because reason always has the right to discard, as contrary to human dignity, all that transgresses its needs. It is one thing, however, to acknowledge this negative task of reason, and quite another to leave in its hands all that involves our lives. This is where we still feel the lack of an adequate criterion—and we are obliged to say that if we take life as a whole and the existential situation of humanity realistically, we must recognize that we do not have the necessary tools for dealing with this situation intellectually. There is always room for another possible reality, which will define and justify itself once it appears and becomes real. We may agree with the fact that we must not suffocate the Spirit, yet it is also true that the Spirit moves where and how it chooses.

## SECULARITY

*Philosophical Reflections*

So much has been said and written, especially recently, on the subject of the sacred and the profane that it is only with great caution that I will venture to sum up the current controversy by suggesting the application of three ideas that may contribute to making such a complex situation a little more comprehensible.

The history of humanity, and that of the individual and collective consciousness of man (from the point of view of his personal development), can be understood sufficiently and explained eucharistically through the three following concepts: *heteronomy*, *autonomy*, and *ontonomy*, as I have already explained.<sup>1</sup>

This idea of universal connection belongs also to heteronomy, but in the latter pluralism is not possible because the union takes place from above, while in the vision of ontonomy each being is unique and irreplaceable and depends on the others as much as they depend on him. Heteronomy is ontologically "monarchic." Ontonomy is merely functional and structured. Heteronomy accepts the existence of a "solitary God" or a world without men. Ontonomy considers such ideas as mere illegitimate abstractions: the relativity of all things is radical.<sup>2</sup>

Each of these three concepts of the world has, over the centuries, developed valid institutions, and it would be an anachronism (and also a methodological error) to judge one period on the basis of the degree of consciousness attained in another. We have called them "kairological moments" in the history of mankind and the development of the human consciousness. In actual fact, they do not represent only, or primarily, three periods in the history of culture, but three basic religious and human attitudes corresponding to three anthropological degrees of consciousness. They do not follow a chronological order but assume kairological importance concomitantly with the inner and outer development of

<sup>1</sup> I formed the word "ontonomy" in the 1940s, without knowing that, meanwhile, Tillich was developing the trio of *autonomy*, *heteronomy*, and *theonomy*. This last term he defines as "This higher law [which] is at the same time the inner law of man himself, rooted in the divine foundation which is the same as man's foundation; the law of life transcends man, even though it is, at the same time, his own" (*Religion and Secular Culture*, conference of 1946, published in *The Protestant Era* [Chicago, 1948], 56-57). Although I am largely in agreement with the idea of *theos* in Tillich, I believe that some of the heteronomic attitudes we both reject may qualify as theonomic. Furthermore, the notion of ontonomy may be used in contexts in which it would be difficult to speak of theonomy, e.g., in the relationship between politics and economy. Clearly it all depends on one's idea of *theos*.

<sup>2</sup> See my book *Il silenzio del Buddha* (Milan, 2006) for a Buddhist version of this radical relativity (not to be confused with agnostic relativism). See also vol. V of the *Opera Omnia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017).

a given situation. We do not force the facts a priori into an inappropriate schema; we will attempt, rather, to comprehend them and discover in them their heteronomous, autonomous, or ontologic relationship with the rest of reality. For our purposes it is enough to consider the main intuitions that these three human attitudes have developed with regard to the problem at hand. It is important to note that we shall focus only on the positive aspects of these three concepts, overlooking the (all too evident) abuses, degradations, and exaggerations that emerge when these values no longer correspond to the degree of consciousness that the average man has of himself and reality.

### Sacred Heteronomy

Traditionally, worship has always been bound to the sphere of the sacred, which was considered the place of relationship with transcendence. The sacred was regarded as being superior to the profane and was believed to exercise a certain power over it. In this way, in a certain sense, the profane was obliged to justify its existence by serving the sacred: "*Quid hoc ad aeternitatem?*" This type of relationship was traditionally considered to be a heteronomous relationship: God is not only superior to man but also his creator and, therefore, his Lord; man must obey not only God but the entire hierarchical order; the religious leader is not only superior to the political leader (the pope to the emperor, the priest to the officer, the *Brahmin* to the *kṣatriya*, the church to the state, and so on), but he dictates the laws; spiritual laws are superior to material laws and, moreover, set the limits within which the latter may develop; theology is the master of philosophy, and the latter determines a priori the scope and the rules of scientific research. As we know, this *Weltanschauung* is still part (though within certain limits) of our modern outlook. From the point of view of heteronomy, the rules and laws that determine the development of a lower sphere of existence are imposed on the latter by an immediately superior sphere. This is a monarchic conception of the world. Caesaropapism and theocracy, like the caste system and state communism, could be taken as examples of heteronomy.

The ontologic notion of worship has all too often been conceived on the basis of the heteronomous concept of the world. Worship is the highest activity that man is given to perform on the earth. Everything else must be geared to making worship as easy as possible. Is not worship the utmost form of homage paid to the highest station? The *Brahmin* and the priest occupy the highest rank in this type of society. Nevertheless, a heteronomous view of worship is not necessarily fitting for all areas of human life. It occupies the highest position but acknowledges the responsibility of other interests in the life of man. The *Brahmin* must be poor, the cleric disinterested. Worship has its own sphere of action: the sacred, which is precisely that which is separated from the nonsacred. The *pro-sanum* is that which is before the temple, but the sacred may also be secular, as we will see later.

In a heteronomous conception of the world, the question of worship involves three key values. On an anthropologic level, the keyword is *adoration*; on a metaphysical level, *eternity* is the dominant concept; and on a cosmological level, *sacrifice* is the constantly dominating category. A brief look at these will suffice.

### Adoration

Adoration is that attitude in which a human being simply surrenders himself to a divine power. This total abandonment is considered a positive act by which the adorer, far from losing anything, fulfills himself.

Adoration is possible in a heteronomous world and is completely relevant in that it rests on three suppositions: (1) the existence of an ego that is totally dependent, contingent, without any value of its own, and lastly, sinful; (2) the existence of a generally personified absolute, a god that is pure goodness; (3) the connection of salvation or the purpose of human existence with the acceptance of (1) and (2). In other words, this form of adoration, which demands to be regarded as the fundamental religious attitude, attempts to combine in a peculiar way the three classic methods of the majority of spiritual traditions: the *karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti* yoga paths. To truly practice worship in this form of adoration, in fact, one must be an ascetic, that is, someone who recognizes that in human nature there is much to be purified and much to be disposed of; one must also recognize that man in himself is worthless, that humility is an ontological virtue and not purely a moral (*karmamārga*) virtue. Furthermore, one must also be a kind of monistic mystic, that is, someone who has discovered beyond doubt that God *alone* is the true and eternal reality, the total Being, the immanent, and at the same time, transcendent (*jñānamārga*) Perfection. One must be immersed in the sense of God, not as a supreme power or first cause but, rather, as an all-invading presence, watchful providence, and person in the absolute meaning of the word: all these are attributes of divinity that, only if they are understood, can lead man to the third aspect of the act of adoration: love (*bhaktimārga*). Only love, in actual fact, enables us to celebrate and to comprehend an act of adoration. This explains the language man uses in adoration: "He is the Lord to whom we owe honor and glory. He can do with us as he wishes; we are his slaves, his servants, his children, his toys, his nonentities.... He holds superhuman power over us and gives us life and happiness; because we have learned that to serve him is to reign, that to acknowledge his sovereignty is to be free, that there is no room for two, that to lose oneself in the beloved means to be one with him. And this is truly what we desire and long for."

### *Eternity*

The second value concerned with worship is the metaphysical supposition of the reality of *eternity* and its heterogeneity in relation with time. Eternity has, so to speak, its own consistency, which makes it totally independent from time. Eternity is neither infinite time nor a sort of supra- or (as the case may be) infra-temporal reality, but an absolutely incomparable and incommensurable reality, bearing no relation to temporal reality. To attain fullness of being, man must transcend time; the word for this is "eternity," which is the specific character of divinity. Strictly speaking, it is not a question of a dualist conception of the universe, even though it has too often given this impression. A certain form of Hindū *vedanta* or of Christian Scholasticism may equally be adopted as examples of the metaphysical conception according to which there is no affinity between God and the world because there is no real relationship. As a total holocaust of the creature, adoration has meaning only if there exists an eternity ready to welcome with open arms the absolute surrender of the adorer. Adoration is not suicide, even though it might seem so to the profane who do not see the reality of the other side, which the creature cannot express with the terms available to him. Eternity is the word that indicates this unutterable and unthinkable reality. The various theological and metaphysical schools disagree, obviously, about its consistency or ontological status and even about whether "eternity" is the most appropriate term. All agree, however, with the fact that temporal reality must be transcended. *Nitya-anityavastu-viveka*: "The discrimination between the temporal and the eternal," to quote Śaṅkarācārya and the Jesuit Nüremberg, who express this intuition perfectly.

*Sacrifice*

The third value is the cosmological conception of *sacrifice*, as it was essentially understood by almost all the religious traditions of the world before the autonomous influence somewhat robbed the notion of its value. The sphere of sacrifice is *orthopraxy*, the sphere of full ontological action, sacred action, action that is not without content, which produces and brings salvation—in whatever form it is understood. Man's task on the earth consists in achieving happiness and attaining salvation. But how is this salvation attained? The act by which this goal may be reached is sacrifice, the reactualization of the primordial act through which the world, man and even time came into existence. Sacrifice is by nature a cosmotheandric act in which God, man, and the world must work together so that reality may continue to exist. It is a cosmic act, because the existence of the world depends on it, and the world must intervene in the process; pure disembodied intentions are not enough. It is a divine act, although God cannot celebrate sacrifice alone, but needs human cooperation. It is a human act, although man needs divine help to render it acceptable.

From this heteronomous viewpoint, worship emerges as the act by which man realizes his salvation. For this reason, man must adore God and surrender to the power of His supreme love, living a life in conformity with the salvific sacrifice, which he will celebrate according to the different rules of the various traditions. Every devotional act will express, in one form or another, these three fundamental values and tend to cultivate them. If we were to examine any of the most lasting forms of religious worship we would discover that they all have practically the same structure.

**Profane Autonomy**

Emerging as a reaction to this conception of the world is the almost opposite ideology of autonomy. In opposition to the empire we have the republic; instead of the church we have the state; instead of philosophy we have science; and instead of the sacred we have the profane. Each sphere of existence has its own rules and does not allow interferences; the nations are sovereign, reason is the supreme arbiter, no individual has more authority than another, and only a democratic process—pragmatically accepted—may introduce a principle of a practical nature. Science, as a whole and in its various parts, regulates research in which no one can interfere, because it must be free and science must be supreme; the sacred may still be valid, but it is limited to its sphere; religion is a private matter and enjoys no privileges—it regulates a part of the human activity of those who still believe in it, but that is all; it is a part and not the whole. The minister of religion is a citizen like anyone else. Religion may be taught in school like any other subject, on condition that it be absolutely optional, because, unlike objective science, it is essentially particular and limited. It has taken centuries of effort and evolution for the so-called lower spheres of existence to assert their rights, and now each of these is claiming its own independence.

The picture is familiar enough and it is therefore not necessary to give any further descriptions. We need only say that, at the very most, this conception of the world may go as far as recognizing that religion and religious values may have a certain right to exist, and therefore will allow only those forms of worship that do not interfere with the values that are assumed to be truly universal and, as such, important to the progress of a society.

Autonomy emerges, in fact, as a reaction to heteronomy; it is almost invariably a rebellion against the abuses of the heteronomous structure; the values are opposed to the key values of the previous position and its keywords are *respect* or *reverence*, *temporality*, and *service* or *work*.

*Respect*

From an autonomous point of view, heteronomous adoration is considered either as idolatry, because the adorer seems to mistake the concept (or image) of God for God himself, or as pure superstition, because sincere adoration is seen as the equivalent of an inhuman surrendering of the personality and a renouncing of human rights, which consequently leads to the total degradation of man, making him believe he is no more than a tool, a dead thing in the hands of an absolute power.

In antithesis to the ecstatic attitude of man in adoration, a more autonomous spirituality would proclaim the *reverence* and the *respect* due to God, emphasizing that God is not an absolutist tyrant and that he himself is bound by his own law and cannot exceed the limits of what is good, true, and beautiful. Autonomy is an anthropological attitude that does not allow purely ecstatic positions. On the contrary, it is proud of its newly discovered self-awareness and its critical attitude. There is still room for God, but a God who respects the rules of the game, a God whose nature and attributes can be discovered and, in some way, postulated. There is just barely room for mysticism. The mystic path always lies in some way outside the normal schema, transcending its structures; it is a path that is scarcely justified in an autonomous world. It is not without reason, in fact, that in an autonomous conception of the world, mysticism is regarded with suspicion.

In the religious man an attitude of reverence implies a self-critical awareness; the subject performing a devotional act always appears on the scene. Reverence, as the etymology of the word suggests, implies the experiencing of awe, almost fear: *re-vereri*.

Similar to reverence is *respect*, which, in fact, represents the very category of autonomy. Reverence is paid to God, but according to the more conscious worship of autonomy, reverence is both tinged with respect and leads to it; esteem and veneration are extended also to man.

Respect in itself does not suggest a hidden God who is closed, ineffable, inaccessible. It no longer allows an apophatic attitude, but involves (as its etymology implies) vision and investigation; it treats the respected thing with "regard" for the very reason that it "sees" its value, beauty, and truth. *Respectus* comes from *respicere*, "to look at," related to the root *spec*, from which originate also *speciosus* and *species*, with a whole range of meanings from "beauty" to "appearance." Respect is certainly democratic: it shows esteem and honor because it considers the value of the respected object; it shows "regard" for it and finds it "noteworthy"; it observes, "notes," sees its value. It is no longer pure surrender or unconditional obedience. It is willing to obey when it recognizes that it is reasonable to do so—though it is not strictly necessary to understand the reasons for each individual commandment.

In this case, worship is reverence to God and respect for his designs, for the world (his creation) and for mankind (his creatures). It is not ecstatic and leaves little room for dance, but places emphasis on the word, on meditation, and on knowledge. Religious man has no longer any intention of losing himself (in God) but, rather, of retrieving something; worship is an act of self-realization. It is not surrender, but acknowledgment of the power of God, Providence, or however we choose to call it. The image of God is eminently personified; what predominates, therefore, is theism, as opposed to the more metaphysical Being of the heteronomic attitude. Personal relationships are fundamental. Personal love is, in this case, the norm.

*Temporality*

*Temporality* is the metaphysical element of this attitude. The essential value is not eternity, but that specific form of human time that we may call *temporality*. Temporality is not

eternity, which has no relation to time as a mere succession of events. Human time, which we call here *temporality*, is a peculiar mode of human existence in which the past is assimilated into the present and carried with in its leap toward the future. Temporality is more a quality than a quantity; it is a qualitative accumulation, a storing of the past in the same way that an accumulator stores energy, conserving it in the present and giving us the power to shape the future. Temporality is not undiscriminated time; it is not the same whether one dies young or old. Ontological growth is a temporal development. Autonomy is blatantly proud of having discovered the value of temporality and having distinguished it from time. Temporality is historicity and memory.

The following schema may be traced:

temporality	aeviternity ( <i>spirits</i> )
	temporality ( <i>human beings</i> )
	time ( <i>physical things</i> )

Temporality may be said to be the generic mode of the duration of beings, their way of existing in the world, the quality of their existence, how they are; it is not something external, but a dimension, a quality, of their own being—what allows them to “continue” existing. The temporality of man, which we have called *temporality*, does not, in a certain sense, have a past; we do not leave it behind (in the “past”); it is, in a specifically human way, present. We are our past that has become integrated in us; it is not “past,” but present and effective. The words “Today you shall be with me in paradise” are not an arbitrary manifestation or a show of absolute power, but an expression of the fact that we carry our entire past with us on our journey, so that our today summarizes and contains all that one is. The same could be said of the future: it is also present in potency.

Temporality is not, therefore, either an object or a “thing in itself”; it is a mode, the temporally human manner in which man exists, perdures, bears, and carries on his existence. Temporality is neither a rigid form nor a recipient; it is a net that binds men to themselves and each other. If temporality disappears, men also will cease to exist. The great victory of autonomy is having discovered that temporality is real, that it is not a transitory and intermediate stage between nonexistence and eternity, nor a temporary institution for existence in time, nor a step we leave behind us. Looking back at the past is a sterile anachronism if it is not integrated in the present. In the autonomous conception of the world, a certain type of conservatorism or traditionalism is regarded as a blind error.

It is pointless to insist on the ambiguity of these ideas. They may be considered as highly negative or extremely positive; they may appear as destroyers of any sense of transcendence or as a sign of maturity that leads us to take seriously the human condition swallowed up by the superstructure of heteronomy.

In this context, worship consists neither in destroying time, nor in sacrificing creatureliness, nor in doing what could not be done in any other way (all typically heteronomous traits), but in using time by giving it form.

#### *Service*

This brings us to the third value: *service*. The cosmological prerequisite of this vision is found in the very nature of the world, which insists on taking part in its maintenance. This is also recognized by the heteronomous attitude, although the method is different. Here we are talking about a real, “human” task, while that was a question of obedience to a monotheistic

activity. It is assumed that every sphere of existence is capable of fulfilling its function on its own strength. It is not the king or the father or, in this case, God who takes care of his subjects, children, or creatures. The democratic spirit makes sure that each is responsible for his own existence, to the extent that the "liberal" sociological model evaluates the person on the basis of his work, and this on the basis of its usefulness, going so far as to deny the right to exist for all those who refuse to "work."

Thus *liturgy* is turned into work, the *ergon* of the *laos*, the action of the people; it is work that must be disinterested and, consequently, provide a service to others, help those who are unable to work, and contribute to improving the lot of those who are less fortunate. Reverence and respect lead to work and service. Everyone must work, serve, and contribute to maintaining the society and the world in general.

In an autonomous world, worship that is mere praise, pure interiorization, would be considered as the greatest betrayal of human dignity and a return to the obscurantism of an age in which man was still immature.

The anthropological perspective of autonomy is clear. Man is not fulfilled by observing, knowing, or contemplating, nor through a passive acceptance of reality, but by working, acting, molding something outside himself, expressing himself through a project, performing a role. He must construct and make himself useful. A large part of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis is dedicated to saving man from his own unaccepted introversion or confinement within his inner life (isolation, narcissism, fear, and so on), projecting him into the world both in order to save him and also because the world needs him; thus man comes to believe that he holds an important place in the universe and plays a vital role in society.

The change is clear. Emphasis is not placed, as in the past, on religion, but on science, reason, and society. The profane, therefore, replaces the sacred. Worship is no longer a means for controlling the unknown and the mysterious, appeasing divine anger, pleading for divine mercy, or glorifying superhuman love. It is the recognition of our dignity and our role as worldwide contributors to establishing a better life here on earth. This applies also to those who still believe that there exists something that is reserved for the other life. In a scientific age, worship will have to refer to psychology, science, and whatever is necessary to give the individual the trust, faith, and love he needs in order for human existence to be full. If God enters the scene he will not be totally proscribed, but he will certainly be conditioned. He will have to accept the rules of the game if he is to be allowed to be part of the picture. Some Christians will be proud of the humanization of God, and China will tell us that man is the true mediator between heaven and earth.

### Cosmotheandric Ontonomy

This neologism means neither the recognition of heteronomy (the regulation of the activity of a particular being through laws established by a higher being) nor that of autonomy (affirmation of the fact that each sphere of existence is absolutely self-regulatory and master of its own destiny). Ontonomy undertakes to express recognition of the regulations pertaining to each area of activity or sphere of existence in the light of the whole. Complete reality, in fact, is neither different from nor identical to a given context or sphere. Ontonomy is based on the assumption that the universe is a whole, that there exists an inner constitutive relationship between each and every thing in reality, that nothing is unconnected.

In our case, ontonomy does not allow any dualism or metaphysical dichotomy; the supremacy of the sacred is no longer defined as being opposed to the secular, and worship is no longer performed to the detriment of work, politics, or any other human activity.

Without wishing to appear polemic, I would add that if the Christian message means something, it is this experience of the cosmotheandric reality of every being, of which Christ, as true God and true man, is the paradigm. In Christ, matter does not exist on its own, with man on one side and God on the other; none of these intrinsically united dimensions overpowers the others, just as it does not make sense to claim that Christ is more divine than human, more worldly than heavenly, or vice versa. The veil of separation has been torn away, and the integration of reality begins with man's redemption. Perhaps, in the light of redemption, this idea of reintegration might influence the reformation of the standards of worship today.

As with the descriptions above, in this part we will consider three main values: *devotion* or love, as an anthropological need; *tempiternity*, as a metaphysical base; and *participation* or mysticism, as the cosmological foundation of an ontonomic conception of the world.

If ontomy is not to be regarded as yet another "conception" but, rather, a true synthesis and harmonious union of the two attitudes examined earlier, the emphasis we will give to these three values must involve not the exclusion but the inclusion of the other positions.

### *Devotion*

Love or *devotion* is considered here as the fundamental tendency of the human being. As its etymology suggests, this notion should be interpreted as profound giving, personal dedication, and total loyalty to a cause, an ideal, or a person. It is not a blind tendency. At the same time, it is not merely a "vow" (*devotus* comes from *devovere*), but a discourse, a proclamation, a *lógos* (*dedicatio* comes from *dedicare*, which is a derivative of *dicere*: to proclaim, to say).

We are not speaking of love as opposed to knowledge, but as integration of the centrifugal and centripetal dynamism of man; as a movement toward something that lies certainly outside and above myself, which might be of an ecstatic nature; but also as a movement from outside toward my deepest center, to help me recognize the greatness of my aspiration, which I would not have been able to discover if love had not urged me in this direction. It is not a vicious circle but, rather, a vital circle, as human experience demonstrates almost daily on all levels. We begin to discover it, along with its value, only after we have taken the first step. And making this (pre)discovery "was" what set us on our way.

This ordinary and almost universal experience involves the human being finding or creating his value by realizing himself, that is, recognizing his own value, believing in it, and acting accordingly. In other words, there is no such thing as either merely objective values independent from the human being, or purely subjective values that are dependent on him. The constitutive element is the relationship; the human person is part of the whole, and consequently his ideas, convictions, and actions are integral parts of the objective world. The objective exists inasmuch as it is subjective, assimilated, personal and, as such, considered incarnate, truly "subjectivated." The subjective, on the other hand, exists because it is objective, or "objectivated," realized, set in motion, crystallized, practicable, and practiced. The relationship between God, Man, and Cosmos is not that of three objects (or two, if we place man and cosmos together in the abstract notion of creature), or that of three subjects, or yet that of a supreme Being with one or two objects. We cannot weigh the relationship between God, Man, and Cosmos either with the parameters of heteronomy or those of autonomy. There is no such thing as God separated from Man (except perhaps in an abstract way of thinking that starts from an abstraction of reality) nor Man separated from God; the same applies also to the World.

The consequence is that whatever man does without inner participation and conviction, without subjective involvement, is not only illicit, false, but *is not*—it has no objective

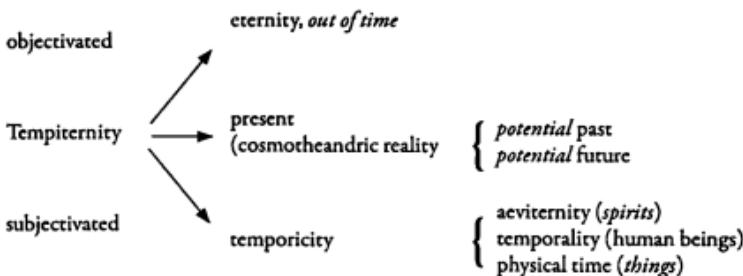
reality. Love, for example, cannot be imposed; it would not be love. Neither can faith be an imposition.

Vice versa, all that man accomplishes without true participation, all that claims to be subjective without an objective involvement, is simply unreal; it is not. Giving, in itself, cannot be the fruit of mere intellectual knowledge or a decision of the will. Ontonomic anthropology goes beyond the objective-subjective distinction in terms not only of epistemology but also of ontology.

### *Tempiternity*

*Tempiternity*, as we have said, is the intuition that operates within the ontonomic attitude. As its name suggests, tempiternity is neither eternity (an objectivated notion), nor temporality (an overly subjective concept).

If we were to complete the picture outlined above we could apply the following schema:



The fundamental intuition of tempiternity originates from the experience of the present in all its depth, discovering not only the past in potency and the future in waiting, but also that which the objectivated projection of humanity has called *eternity* and the subjectivated human sensitivity has called *time* (or, according to our terminology, *temporality*). The experience of the present breaks, so to speak, the shell of the temporary and the flowing not for the sake of falling into an ecstatic or intemporal abyss, neither of denying time, but in order to taste the almond enclosed within it. All human experience is fulfilled in time, yet it is neither bound by nor limited to it. There is no sense in temporally imprisoning a mystic experience, nor in saying that true love has a temporal end. Likewise, it is incongruous to state that death is not real because it suppresses subjective time; it is inconsistent to talk of an aesthetic experience by placing it in a time outside its temporality; it is impossible to experiment with time during an intellectual discovery, at the very "moment" in which an intuition about something, whether small or great, surfaces in us for the first time, and so on.

In this context, a significant corollary (of which, however, we can only give a brief outline here) is the human experience of rhythm. This is an experience neither of mere repetition nor of pure movement. Rhythm cannot be explained exclusively through one's memory of the past and anticipation of the future. The experience of rhythm is that which most closely resembles the *advaitic* experience. It is neither awareness of monolithic oneness or monotony repeated to infinity, nor the action of a dualistic diversity or a basically different movement. Rhythm

is always the same and different in the same time and place (whether it involves the muscles of the body, rays of light in the eyes, or sounds in the ears). It is a transtemporal experience, something that does not divert or distract us from time but allows us to perforate it and reach its deepest secrets. The core of time thus reveals itself to us as it is—or, more precisely, shows itself by disappearing and becoming identified with us. Through rhythm we express what would otherwise be inexpressible. This expression exists in time, yet the real symbol that rhythm carries transcends time. And this applies, in one form or another, to every type of rhythm—musical, scientific, literary, and cosmic.

### *Participation*

*Participation* (and, in a certain sense, *mysticism*) may, from a cosmological point of view, be the keyword for the ontonomic experience.

The latter answers the dual conviction that (1) reality has a hidden, invisible dimension that, in one way or another, may be brought to the light or the surface of the real; and (2) only when we become aware of this dimension of reality (even if only indirectly) can human life be authentic.

By mysticism we mean the experience of the immediate contact with reality that eliminates the subject-object distinction, just as the implicitly ever-present distance existing in any kind of dualism.

The word *participation* aims to express that cosmological view that contemplates the interindependence and interpenetration of all things and their mutual relationship with the deepest structure of reality. We *exist* to the extent in which we participate in the whole and allow this whole to participate, to express itself, through us. I exist in that I am involved and included in the whole reality, to the extent in which I take part, participate, in the whole process of the universe.

Being a person does not mean being here or there and remaining isolated or detached from the whole. The existence of the person is not an isolated existence; he exists inasmuch as he participates in the whole, within which he fulfills a well-defined and unique *function*. In order to perform this role we need a mask, because what we are, as parts, is this mask; there is nothing else behind or under it, and yet this "nothing" itself supports the mask and allows us to perform our role. We are persons, that is, functions, operating centers in an assortment of relationships.

Worship, then, comes to mean the act by which we express, in one way or another, the fullness of the human person. This involves devotion and love (the heart, the emotions)—the gift, that is, of our being.

Second, worship implies the integration of transtemporal reality in temporality as the fundamental dimension of the real; it is neither of this world nor of the next—it is cosmothandric; it insists on an idea of the whole, an aspect of contemplation, the total involvement of the spirit, a mystical attitude.

Third, worship demands participation in the cosmic process of the world and the dynamism of reality and, consequently, the overcoming of individualism, not only between men but also between things and God himself. Worship is participation in the whole of reality; it is a sacramental act in which all things—matter and spirit, divine and human, body and soul, angelic and demonic, and so on—work together so that reality may exist and be expressed in the symbol that it itself is.

In this context, the answer to the question regarding the reason for worship may be laid out as follows: I take part in worship because without it I could not be myself and you could

not be yourself. The nondevotional acts of my life are incomplete and one-sided; they pursue a certain goal and nothing more. An act of worship allows us to fulfill ourselves and contribute to completing the universe. This is confirmed every day by experience, which shows us that we celebrate an act of worship only when we are truly expressing what we are without hypocrisy, without selfishness, without superficiality and falseness. And we do not always celebrate it in solitude, or through works, or collectively; it depends on the circumstances and includes all these aspects. During a devotional act we feel we are part of the workings of the universe while, at the same time, the universe is transformed in us and through us.

The theistic image of heteronomy is not so central in this context, nor are the theistic tendencies of autonomy essential. It is by no means a question of an atheist or "atheistic" attitude, but it is not necessary to insist on the transcendent or immanent aspects of divinity. *Jñāna* and *bhakti*—that is, *gnosis* and *agape* (or, in other words, knowledge and love)—are now recognized and accepted. These two elements, however, have become integrated in a *karmic* movement, that is, in the mechanism of *orthopraxy*, which does not allow either the subjective or the objective to predominate.

### Three Attitudes

The modern phenomenon of secularization may be conceived in relation to each of the three perspectives outlined: heteronomy, autonomy, and ontonomy.

#### *Heteronomy*

Based on the first attitude, heteronomy, secularization will be considered to be the blasphemous act of tearing apart the seamless tunic of hierarchical and structured reality. It will be the breaking of every order, and shall be judged incompatible with any form of worship. Religion will strive to resist the temptation of secularization, regarded as pure prostitution. One typical argument of this kind of arrangement is the pragmatic observation that all attempts at desacralization on the part of man are doomed to failure: the sacred kicked out of the door will always come back in through the window. Religious processions are suppressed, but political parades take their place; sacred formalisms have been ridiculed, but political ceremonies have replaced them. Sacramental life is looked down on, yet new sacraments are introduced in secular guise; veneration and worship have been stigmatized as idolatry and superstition, yet today we have many examples of the worship of every kind of hero or idol. Religious authority has been scorned, as has the divine origin of the authority, yet the state has never had such powerful means of interference and dominion as those made possible by the development of modern technology. One example that comes to mind is that of the famous *Jugendweihe*, which was practiced in East Germany several years ago.

The tendency of the heteronomous attitude is as clear as it is intransigent: lost order must be restored, and mistakes must be recognized by both sides; but while one side has only made bad use of power and perhaps, on occasion, has abused situations of privilege, the mistake of the "others" is fundamental. Only by restoring the central role and traditional function of worship can man and society initiate the regeneration we are all seeking.

#### *Autonomy*

The reaction of the autonomous attitude will be exactly the opposite of that described above. It will hail the secularization of man and society as the great conquest of our time,

and the overthrowing of the sacred as the greatest victory gained in the liberation of man, enslaved as he was by the dominion, if not terror, of the sacred. Sacrality was synonymous with the unknown; it did nothing but exploit man's ignorance and weakness and served only to instill in him passivity and resignation, thus preventing all progress and evolution.

According to this opinion, if worship is to have meaning in the life of modern man, all its traditional forms must remain confined, in an initial transition period, to the private area of human life, in order to allow the emerging of new explanations and a total liberation from such traditional forms of worship. After this initial stage, however, it will be necessary to identify secular forms that are capable of expressing their content in a secular world.

In a Christian context, an attitude of this kind will insist, for example, on the fact that the Eucharist must be, above all, a banquet whose reality must not be overshadowed by forms that alter its meaning and symbolism as well as its beauty. This attitude will emphasize that baptism and marriage are not acts of magic or mysterious actions that unite men but, on the contrary, liberating experiences that allow men to be more fully themselves; that prayer, as a pretext for abandoning action and comfortably seeking refuge in the sphere of the sacred, must be secularized and transformed into responsible action. Autonomy will seek to transform worship into work and meditation into another human activity such as reflection, and will attempt to free man's political life from the weights of inferiority and the imperfection with which the tyranny of the sacred had burdened political life.

The tendency of the autonomous attitude is equally clear: we must do away with sentimentalism and the old bonds and arrive at the conviction that a new age is emerging for the consciousness of man—the age of secularity, which demands that religious man be converted to the world and its values so that he may redeem them, traditionally speaking, or enhance and enrich them (to use modern, secular terms). True love for God is service to men, and the highest form of worship is not proclaiming in song the marvels of an invisible Creator, but exalting man's own possibilities of leaping toward the future and redeeming it from poverty, sickness, hatred, and injustice.

Heteronomy rejects all compromise and claims that "worship in a secular age" must be more than ever the exaltation of the sacred, rigorously preserved in open contradiction and opposition to the modern world and its secular spirit, because only in this way can it be the life belt that will keep humanity afloat once the devastating waves of the present-day unreligiousness have died down. While heteronomy says, in fact, that there is no such thing as secular worship in itself, autonomy declares adamantly that the only truly possible form of worship in a secular age is secularized worship. Worship also must undergo the purifying process through which history has passed if it is to survive as something more than a museum piece on the dusty shelves of obscurantism.

### *Ontonomy*

*Ontonomy*, on its part, will uphold neither a firm opposition between worship and secularization (the attitude of heteronomy) nor a certain identification between the two (the position of autonomy), but will consider worship as one of the very elements of secular life itself, allowing space for the devotional dimension of secularity. *Ontonomy* will endeavor to say that the important worship is that of the secular world, in the subjective genitive sense of the phrase—the secular world's act of worshiping.

First of all, the ontonomic attitude is not a compromise; neither is it a middle term that seeks to keep the two extremes together. It is an original position, in a certain way simpler than the other two attitudes, which end up by being dualistic. The ontonomic attitude tells

secularized man that nothing is more sacred than secular reality, adding, for traditional man, that *sanctity* is not a value in itself but one of the dimensions of *cosmotheandric* reality. In facing the problem, this attitude will adopt neither the method of mere restoration nor that of total reform, but will attempt to reevaluate all values. It will transcend, for example, both the dualistic and the monistic systems, since both end up by degrading worship or making it impossible. If, on one hand, worship inevitably involved paying homage to a *Totally Other*, we would fall into the temptation of shifting the final responsibility for our existence onto him. On the other hand, if we only accepted one single monolithic reality, there would be no room for any true worship. Contrariwise, the *ontonomic* attitude insists on the *cosmotheandric* nature of reality and discovers worship as that conscious activity that transforms reality itself from within. We will avoid presenting here a complete theory of worship, however, since our task consists simply in explaining its relationship with secularity.

The *ontonomic* attitude does not consider the process of secularization as intrinsically bad; while it is not afraid to face its dangers, it discovers that every real human situation contains an inner dynamism that directs it toward a deeper unity, and that the only risk is the *schism*, or breaking up, of unity. Anthropologists tell us that originally everything was sacred; the modern world is now completing the circle by secularizing everything. The sacred and the profane are two aspects of a single reality, and each of them becomes incomplete, and also false, as soon as it claims for itself a separate sphere. These are, first and foremost, complementary aspects, and they belong to a certain level of the consciousness of humanity. The task of freeing worship from the control of one or the other may be reserved for the future generation, but we can prepare the way by building a bridge to connect the sacred with the secular. The sacred is dialectically opposed to the profane, but not to the secular.

The process of secularization is not necessarily to be regarded as a mere reaction to the established sacred order, although, in most cases, this may be true. There is a difference between *secularization*, which means the progression of the sacred toward the profane; *secularity*, as a secular order, which, from a factual point of view, may collaborate with the sacred and recognize its rights; and *secularism*, which would represent the intolerant destruction of every sacred order. Aside from the immediate causes of secularization and how it has come about, the secular conception of reality has no reason to be considered exclusively from an autonomous point of view, that is, as a reaction or rebellion and as totally incompatible with a profound religiosity and, therefore, an authentic idea of worship. Nevertheless, if we examine the question more closely, we may wonder whether "secularism" might not be used for the autonomous reaction and "secularity" for the *ontonomic* attitude.

Whatever terminological policies we choose to adopt, one thing must remain clear: not only do all men live on truth, but in every culture and religion it is truth that fuels the lives of its "believers."

In the following pages we will attempt to develop certain principles that may be applied immediately to this problem of worship and secularity.

## WORSHIP

*Theological Suggestions*

**The Principle of Complementarity**  
**(Worship in Favor of and against Life)**

We have defined *worship* as the ultimate expression of a belief. But to what extent does this mean it must be an expression of the life of a population at any given time? If worship is the expression of a belief, it must be the manifestation of the life of the people that animates this belief, because life is shaped by beliefs. Yet it remains to be seen to what extent these beliefs are an incentive or a corrective for this life or a testimony in favor of another completely different life.

The word *expression* may seem too passive or too immanent. Emphasizing its complementary sense, we could also say "impression." Worship is that which expresses a particular belief and, at the same time, what is "impressed" by, responds to, and reacts to a belief. If it does, in fact, derive from both, then neither pure transcendence nor pure immanence is possible. Worship is the expression of a belief as much as belief is the expression of worship. The impression of worship in belief is just as important as the impression of belief in worship. The relationship is mutual. This is the polarity we wish to examine from a specific viewpoint.

Several points seem to be clear:

- If it is to truly fulfill its function and be what it aims to be, worship must be in direct relationship with the life of the people. It cannot exist only on a transcendent level. Worship is essentially popular or, if we prefer, tribal.
- Worship must have certain features by which it can be recognized and made effective. It would be useless to turn the whole world into a temple, nor would it solve the problem to identify the temple with the world in general. If everything is worship, nothing is. In other words, there must be identity on one hand and difference on the other.

Beginning with the history of religions we can formulate what I would call the *law of complementarity*. When identification between life and worship is an accepted fact—when, that is, it is taken for granted that worship is a function of life—then the difference between the two becomes more pronounced in order to maintain the healthy element of tension and complementarity that is necessary if human existence is to remain dynamic and not become stagnant. When the priest and the monk are considered as an integral part of society, then their separation from the world is equally pronounced. When the houses are poor, the temples

are rich. When all appears to be tinged with the sacred, then worship withdraws into the innermost chapels of the temples, into the most inaccessible caverns in the mountains, into the monastic cloisters; the difference is even more pronounced with the use of a scholarly and, in a certain way, artificial language. *Sacred* is synonymous with *segregated, secluded, inexpressible, transcendent, difficult* (few are those who reach salvation).

There are two main categories related to this "setting apart": time and space. When everything is sacred, when all the aspects of life are clothed in myth and refer constantly to transcendence, the forms of worship assert themselves through differentiation, with each claiming certain places and times that are particularly important to their own function. All history of religions makes mention of these special times: the morning and the evening (*sandhya*, lauds, vespers), the distinction between holy days and minor holy days, festivities and, generally, the whole calendar. The same applies to space: there are special places, such as sanctuaries, water courses, mountains, caverns, or simple fences, including inside the city or other inhabited places. The Benedictine vow of stability, for example, is something more than a reaction to the abuses of vagrant monks; it represents dedication to a holy life conceived according to the spatial principle of holiness.

When, on the other hand, the difference is regarded as a fundamental principle, we find ourselves faced with the separation between church and state, the clear distinction between the realm of God and that of Caesar, civil life and religious life. In short, when the profane asserts its rights against the sacred by opposing it, then identity is consciously accentuated: true love for God is service to men; devotion is honesty; work is worship; the city of God must be built here on earth, neither in Garizin nor in Jerusalem; all rivers are the Ganges and all water is equally holy; the altar is only wood and the temple an ordinary house; Indra and Varuna and all the gods are different names for the same power; and so on.

The immanence-transcendence tension is increased in a different way in relation to this principle of complementarity.

Roman Catholic spirituality in the last few centuries is a clear example. Once the "Holy Week" was reduced to pure folklore or an incomprehensible ritual, popular piousness began to be fueled by "spiritual exercises" and Ignatian-type retreats. When the canonical prayers in Latin were no longer understood and began to be reserved, more or less, for the clergy, then the reciting of the rosary, the novenas, and other forms of oral prayer became popular. When Mass became an almost private affair between the priest and God (although it was still assumed that the priest represented the people), ascetic and devotional life began to take other directions. When liturgy is celebrated in the local language and personal piousness is interpreted in an almost exclusively collective way, then other forms of interiority with varying degrees of "oriental" flavor are sought. In short, the tensions between immanence/transcendence, profane/sacred, and spiritual/material are balanced out in virtue of the principle of complementarity for the sake of maintaining balance in the human being.

We may formulate two direct consequences of this principle of complementarity.

#### *The Integration of Worship in Ordinary Human Life*

Under this title I would like to chronicle the efforts made to "humanize" worship. The people eat. It is therefore the action of eating that must be transformed by the sacramental presence, and the Eucharist must then recover its symbolism as a meal. The people dance and make merry. Worship must amplify its aspect of celebration and festivity. People are born, grow up, get married, work, and die. The sacraments and other devotional actions must sanctify and consecrate these most universal and elementary human acts. The sacraments

of initiation, coming of age, marriage, and so on must not be mere ceremonies and forms of anachronistic ritualism; they must be truly related to these important moments of human existence and have a comprehensible meaning; in short, they must give them real form. And since most of these acts are extremely fleeting, ritual life cannot be reduced to one holy day celebrated once and for all. In other words, worship must once more impregnate human life and give it fullness of meaning by exalting the significance of these human acts and providing man with the strength (the grace) required for experiencing the needs of the human vocation. A global reform is necessary.

One of the greatest difficulties in the contrast between historic religions and modernity lies in the rural context of practically all the traditional forms of worship, while in our time, life—and especially city life—is dominated by what could be called *techni-culture*. From the last century onward, the world, and the West in particular, has accepted an overwhelming variety of new techniques that have given life to this "technological" era. One of the most fascinating functions of worship may consist in transforming the current technological age into a *techni-cultural* age. By this we do not mean a complete and ruthless technification or abandonment of the ecosophic reality. Earth and man belong to each other, and the human context today is neither rural nor technological, but *techni-cultural*. Pure nature and virgin earth are just as much an illusion as fully mechanized man. Today we need neither exclusively rural nor exclusively technical structures; neither agriculture nor technology is sufficient. Techniculture, which is now timidly making its appearance, might be authentically human and not dehumanizing. It no longer cultivates the fields of an immaculate earth, but it vibrates with the pulsations of this macro-anthro-po-organism, which, though it is called *cosmos*, does not necessarily exclude a reference to the divine mystery.

#### *The Inclusion of Life in Worship*

Worship is, after all, a human act and not an angelic realization. Its symbols must be real. If they refer to "bread" and "wine," then bread and wine must be present; if it involves a kiss of love and an embrace of peace, then these must be acts capable of putting an end to every form of hatred and must truly offer us love and peace; if it refers to the purification of our sins, there must be a visible sign in our lives; if it regards prayer to God, this must not hinder the action and initiative of man. Worship cannot be disconnected from ordinary human life, and the first condition is that it is not merely something living but an integral part of life itself. How can I believe that worship is the most important act in my daily life if I cannot find time for it, or can only reserve it as an insignificant corner of my weekly routine, just for the sake of silencing my conscience? If today human life avoids solemnity and pomp, if man's temporal consciousness is no longer dominated by the experience of privileged moments in time, then modern worship can only have meaning and importance if it comes down from the pedestal of solemnity and privilege and offers itself on the level of everyday human existence.

These two points are related. On one hand, worship must penetrate ordinary human life and, on the other, real human life must give vitality and meaning to worship. Such symbiosis is important and vital. It is also difficult. For centuries, at least in the West, these two spheres have been separate and have had very little contact. Life has followed one path and worship another. It is not surprising that there has been such widespread talk of its alienation.

The problem is both difficult and unavoidable. We must not fall prey to superficial optimism and take the easy path of desiring that worship simply keep behind life and even the fleeting novelties of fashion. Neither can we adopt the restricting and somewhat inhuman attitude of regarding worship as a mere corrective and completion of life. It would be equally

partial to preserve the Latin liturgy only for the beauty of the Gregorian chant, or introduce jazz into liturgy for its popular appeal and its exuberance. Likewise, it would be unfair to eliminate the *durga-pūjā* because it causes a certain economic inequality, or attempt to enforce the possibility for outsiders to worship in Hindu temples. The criterion must be of a completely different type.

At this point it may be appropriate to refer to the idea of life and, especially, liturgy as a game—a cosmic game played with passion and seriousness though without a tragic sense, a game with rules to be followed, but only for temporal existence. Liturgy is the representation on a human scale of the global game of the universe. Life is included in the forms of worship, since the latter demands only to be the very quintessence of human life, expressing not only its individual symbolism but also its meaning and its cosmic vocation.

Let us take a closer look at some of the implications and difficulties relating to this principle of complementarity in its dual dimension of worship in favor of and against life.

### The Corollary of Universality and Concreteness

The principle of complementarity seeks to harmoniously combine two characteristics of human truth: its universality and its concreteness. Any value that does not include in its sphere a need for universality cannot truly be regarded as such. A private truth, limited to its own sphere, cannot really be considered as a value. Like a private language, a private truth is a contradiction in terms; both essentially involve relationships. Likewise, a merely abstract truth without any direct reference to a concrete human situation, which neither epitomizes any part of it nor bears any relation to a specific context, cannot truly be considered as a human truth.

One characteristic (equally phenomenological and theological) of every mature religious attitude consists in seeking a certain universal validity without lessening its need to be concrete. This would be the philosophical "translation" of the incarnation: the revelation of a God in human form or, in other words, the concrete manifestation, incarnation, expression, image, and so on of universal truth. Under different names this phenomenon seems to be present in almost all religious traditions: the descent of the absolute to the relative.

No attitude may be considered truly religious if it does not claim both these apparently contradicting aspects. The tension is clear. It is easy to be universal, open to everything, tolerant, and so on, as long as we renounce the concrete, the historical, the corporal. Likewise, we may exalt the value of the concrete, the individual, the factual, and the historical by disregarding the reality or importance of the mystical, the universally valid, the global. This polarity can be found practically everywhere. Indian religiosity accentuates the first tendency, while Semitic religions are typical representations of the second. It is equally certain (with a few exceptions) that the Christian doctrine has emphasized mainly the Semitic tendency, for obvious historical reasons. I believe, however, that a harmonious combination of the two aspects is essential to the Christian mystery.

The extraordinary consequence of these corollaries is that worship cannot be sectarian, nor can it exclude all those who live and work with us; at the same time, it must be concrete and meaningful for the person as an individual. This is an enormous problem in a pluralistic society. Worship should be the inspirational force behind all work, our main guide in all our daily activities; yet how can this be so if we share these activities with people who do not recognize such worship or find it meaningless or even offensive? If we insisted, we would fail in our purpose. Must we, therefore, make worship a private matter? Are we forced to settle for a short inner prayer—or a simple inner, private resolution—before work, meals, or any other

activity? Or is it a question of finding new forms of worship that are universally accepted or, at least, acceptable? What are these universal symbols of today? The flag, the perennial flame at the shrine of the unknown soldier, the constitution, the founder or the liberator of the nation, the man on the moon? God was once the universally recognized symbol, and until some time ago in Europe, the international treaties and peace treaties were signed in the name of the Holy Trinity. Allah is a living symbol in Islamic countries. Our world, however, has grown geographically without any corresponding symbolic maturity. Only slowly does the unifying mythical horizon seep through.

Introducing life into forms of worship does not simply mean making the music more exciting. It means discovering values that are universal or rather (and the correction is very important) universally recognized or at least acceptable values, without uprooting them from their respective contexts. The universal is not the common denominator but the ratio of every relationship between man and the whole absorbing and mysterious reality.

The task may seem difficult, and indeed it is; yet, one on hand, it is *imperative*, and on the other, it is not *impossible*.

It is *imperative*, in that there can be no human communion and true fraternity without liturgy to embrace us. It is likely that one of the reasons (effect or cause) for the profound crisis that the United Nations is going through is the incapacity to develop a liturgy, a form of worship that is truly universal and meaningful. In the face of an authentically universal horizon, all religions appear sectarian and all humanisms superficial. We must accept the challenge without hesitation if we are to seriously tackle the problem of worship in a secular age.

To have a full life, I must live in communion with my fellow creatures. Man cannot live in isolation, much less survive. Yet there can be no real human communication without baring the roots of human existence itself. Communion means something more than a mere exchange of information; true human communion can only exist if it becomes religious communion, in the broad sense of religion. If there is no *communicatio in sacris* (to use classical theological language) there is no communication, but merely an exchange of words or a simple acknowledgment of the other's presence for the sake of removing the obstacles that prevent us from freely following our own path. Commonly used forms of greeting were generally religious, and still are when they are used in a deep way, even though we do not understand the meaning of the words and gestures. The way in which I might enter into communion with a Muslim or a Sioux is by taking part in a "blood union" or a "sweat lodge" and not a purely rational or "social" meeting that forbids all personal intimacy and does not take into account the ancestral roots of the persons involved.

Real human communication is communion on the deepest level of our being, even when we do not share the same opinions or have different scales of values. This religious type of communication represents a sort of phenomenological definition or, at least, description of the religious meeting and also of religion. If religion has a value, it is only significant on this level. This deep stratum of human existence, where our destiny is called into play, where our life is truly lived and our ideals are fueled, is the sphere of religion. And if any human encounter occurs on this level, it is of a religious nature—whatever the affiliation or religious ideas of the persons involved.

It is clear that worship, if it is to be true worship for our time and not remain confined to a private affair to the advantage of a chosen minority, must regain a certain nonsectarian universality and, above all, reach that deep level where the human being is real and essentially what he is supposed to be. This brings with it serious consequences, but if we do not get to the root of the problem it all becomes mere superficial ranting.

This task of discovering universal symbols is *not impossible* because, in spite of human differences and religious discrepancies, the nature of man is one, and the human adventure is also. Through reason we can discover the fundamental role of worship: finding or creating existential convergences between people. Religion has too often been identified with orthodoxy, for the very reason that *orthopraxy* was taken for granted a prioristically. Today we are more aware than a century ago that the fundamental dimension of religion cannot be found in the sphere of ideas but in that of praxis (that of good and genuine actions that lead man to his goal); that is, in what was traditionally called the *sacred action* or *act of worship* through which man fulfills his destiny. The priority given to orthodoxy was the reason why those who refused to share the same doctrine were not allowed to take part in the same worship; it would no longer be the same worship, in fact, if worship were defined exclusively by doctrine.

If, on the other hand, the emphasis is placed on orthopraxy, that is, the actual carrying out of the proper action that leads man directly or indirectly to full development or the purpose of his life (or however we prefer to call it), then we may take part in a rite or carry out together a meaningful act even if we do not share the same doctrinal system or the same ideas.

In relation to this, reform—or, more precisely, conversion—must be radical. In almost all cultures and religions God has long been a universally accepted symbol; he symbolized supreme reality even when the various systems and religions had different ideas about the nature of the divine. Today, the name of God no longer seems to carry the same symbolic power, because we have turned it into a concept. Today, on the contrary, it appears to be a somewhat controversial name, and many would like to divide humanity into "believers" and "nonbelievers"—the former being those who claim to believe in a personal God, and the latter those who say they do not believe in this divine person. Once we accept that the idea of a personal God may be meaningless to some and, at the same time, claim that the heart of religion lies in orthodoxy, either the "nonbeliever" is brought down to the level of unreasonable or God is reduced to a superfluous hypothesis, since his essential function as the ultimate referent of all things is denied. A God who is the ultimate hypothetical referent of all things cannot be denied by any thought. A God who is declared by some and denied by others can no longer be a universal symbol.

The words of St. Anselm: "Id quo magis cogitari nequit" (That of which nothing greater can be thought) means in this context, "Id sine quo cogitari nequit" (That without which nothing can be thought), the consequence of which is "Id quod cogitari nequit" (Something which cannot be thought). Using a historical-religious term we could say that no idea of God may substitute for the myth of God, and that only the latter may be the universal referent for those who live in this myth.

To avoid misunderstandings, I will add that followers of any religion are not denied the right, and therefore the duty, to practice their rituals according to the rules established by the authorities and tradition. These rituals, however, generally have little to do with the problem of worship in a secular age, because they seem to ignore the fact that in humanity there has never been ideological uniformity even among those belonging to the same tradition—which proves that faith does not identify with doctrine. Today, the greatest need of any religion consists in expressing a human universality within one's own concrete values.

The interplay between the universal and the concrete is part of the order of life, and the balance between these two poles of human existence and all reality offers us an existential criterion of authenticity for every form of worship. Human participation in a genuine act of worship enables man to be more deeply rooted in the earth while growing closer to the sky. Sacrificing concreteness on the altar of professed universality would only lead to lifeless abstraction. Sacrificing universality to defend alleged concreteness would lead to fanaticism

or spiritual closure. The balance between the concrete and the universal is not dialectical, and the creative tension between these two poles should not be confused with the dichotomy between the general and the specific. It is not a question of a quantifiable relationship. Each man, like each religion, is not a single number (a part) of a larger group, although everything that is truly concrete reflects and "concentrates" the universal.

Either we identify the religious fact with the existing historic religions without allowing them the possibility to grow and, therefore, to change (and then we would have a religiosity of the past) or we believe that the religious mystery expresses a new human dimension every day, since life is dynamism. If this is the case, then the modern-day humanist, just as the Christian or the Hindu, will have to seek out the most suitable forms of worship for maintaining a balance between concreteness rooted in the past and universality projected toward the future. This would not weaken any religion, but would prepare the way for enabling them to fulfill their mission in the world today and to open up to a possible mutual fecundation.

### The New "Nigrics" in Contrast with the Ancient Rubrics

In the liturgical language used in western Europe beginning in the fourteenth century (though not becoming generally used until the seventeenth century), the *rubrics* (so called because they were written in red) indicate the external acts that accompany the internal acts in the divine service. Next to the rubrics was the actual text used in the act of worship. As these texts were generally written in black they are called *nigrics*. The history of the development of worship in every religion shows in each an almost constant pattern that might be summed up as follows.

Originally there was not a great difference between rubrics and nigrics. Form and content were inseparable; the exterior and interior acts were of equal importance. Any sacramental theology can offer us examples and reflections that illustrate how the sacramental act is a special combination of internal and external actions. Through a fascinating process in which the human consciousness is completely involved, rituals were gradually interiorized until, finally, the intent began to take control to such an extent as to place the material, external aspect of the act in danger.<sup>1</sup> At this point a compromise was made, and a certain (at times precarious) balance was achieved between nigrics and rubrics. The history of worship shows that it was sometimes the rubrics which, in some way, created the nigrics; this means that external actions often conditioned the prayers and internal attitudes of worship. Other times, it was the nigrics, the intent or conscious force, that sought expressive forms. To say that the nigrics must create the rubrics would be defining the question in excessively intellectual and theoretical terms, as if man's creative force resided only in his mind. Yet it would be equally one-sided to claim that the initiative must be taken by the rubrics and that the rubrics must conform by filling in the space created by the external, spontaneous manifestations of worship. Moreover, the contemporary secular spirit refuses to accept the idea of a *mythopoietic* period<sup>2</sup> during which "God" himself reveals the most appropriate way of worshiping him. It is in relation to this that the need arises for a synthesis between secularity and tradition. Worship does not consist in "receiving" from "God," but neither is it a mere action of our "human"

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter "Les trois phases du culte," in my book *Le mystère du culte* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 53-81, which examines this paradigmatic evolution in Hinduism.

<sup>2</sup> [Editor's note: *Mythopoietic* period: a period of myth generation; from *mythopoiein*: to imagine or build myths.]

being. A form of worship dictated only by "God" would not be easily accepted today, while another developed by man would in itself be contradictory and useless. The theandric nature of worship reappears. The theandric does not mean the dichotomy of a divine initiative accepted by human receptivity, but the nondualistic experience of an act that is both fully human and superhuman. These observations may be enough to highlight the enormous complexity and, at the same time, the urgency of the problem of worship.

Let us merely consider a few points.

### *The New Rubrics*

Over the centuries, all religious traditions have developed a certain number of rules and canons with the intention of crystallizing the spirit and practice of authentic worship. There are religious traditions in which rubrics are essential. The *mimāṃsaka* interpretation of Vedic sacrifices and the habitual insistence in post-Tridentine Roman Catholicism regarding the specific words of the eucharistic consecration are two clear examples of what I am trying to say; if we do not follow certain rubrics, the devotional action is considered invalid.

It is easy to criticize obsolete rubrics and point out the risk of superstition and even magic that arises when the rubrics begin to dominate in worship. Yet it is equally deceptive to presume that all the rules of ritual may be disregarded. It is an undeniable fact, however, that most of these fundamental rites are today clearly in crisis. One characteristic common to all authentic rites consists in the fact that they belong to what I have called the "collective conscious" (the treasure or legacy) of a given human group. For this very reason, once a rite has become reflectively self-conscious and placed under critical judgment it cannot survive without changing; it will either evolve or simply disappear, or else it will cease to be a living rite and become dead ritualism, preserved, perhaps, to the extreme by a minority that considers itself as the guardian of the rite in question.

It is easy to comprehend the indignation of the new generations when they see their elders engaged in discussions, for example, on the need for the drop of water in the eucharistic chalice, or whether the criteria for Christian inter-communion may be found in the subtleties of Scholastic theology, thus forgetting that the crisis of the rubrics is a crisis of universally recognized symbols and not of the distinct meaning of a specific doctrine, however important it may be in a certain context.

We have already defined worship as a symbolic act that expresses a given belief. The Christian rubric par excellence is that which symbolizes the salvific action of Christ. Now, this action can be symbolized in different ways: a man alone in a two-square-meter room, uttering sacred words in memory of the passion of Christ; a Christian priest under a regime of fierce persecution, breaking pieces of bread and passing them to his fellow Christians in a secret meeting; or a crowd crying out in joy because Christ is risen and has visited each of them in the depths of their hearts.

Let us now take a look at some of the rubrics that seem to be important in an age of increasing secularity. These do not in any way represent a complete list, much less claim to substitute the ancient rubrics.

### *Spontaneity*

*Spontaneity* is one of the most important rubrics for authentic worship. A spontaneous rubric may seem like a contradiction in terms, seeing that it represents a rule that must be followed in order to carry out an act or to which the symbolic action must conform. Strictly

speaking, however, it is not. What violates spontaneity is not the rubric, but the artificial imposition of the rubric on the nigric, or vice versa—that is, when a gap is created between the two that prevents their mutual influence and interaction. Once again, the problem of worship is not simply a matter of speculative thought.

By the word *spontaneity* we mean the use of living symbols, symbols that are perceived as natural and have no need for scholarly explanations in order to be understood by the human heart. The use of saliva and imprecations against a bad, "unclean" spirit, for example, may not mean today what they meant centuries ago, so prescribing their use would not be spontaneous.

It is part of the very morphology of symbols to transmit the message they carry in a natural form. Eating and drinking, for example, are symbolic acts that may easily be used to transmit the content of a sacramental message. Bread and wine, on the other hand, cannot perhaps express this symbolism effectively outside the Mediterranean area and its sphere of influence. Likewise, genuflection or the kiss may be spontaneous forms of veneration and love in certain cultures, while in others they may not have the same meaning or may even be considered offensive.

The rubric of spontaneity would mean, therefore, that no symbol can be imposed, and that every symbol may be rejected in time if it ceases to fulfill its symbolizing function. Like cultures and man himself, in fact, symbols are fleeting. Spontaneity does not mean anarchy, but the establishing of an authentic order. Anarchy is established automatically when a rule is imposed from outside and only for this reason is obeyed. Sooner or later, this act of authority is followed by negligence and breaking of the rules, leading to a state of confusion equal to anarchy. There are endless examples of this.

Spontaneity in the rubrics not only creates an atmosphere of freedom and trust in the group celebrating a given rite, but also makes it possible to retain the original spirit. Those taking part in an act of worship have been urged to abandon the rite (even if it has already begun) and first reconciled themselves with their fellows. Spontaneity demands authenticity and pureness of heart, the traditional original condition for any form of worship. Everywhere we find rites of purification that precede the actual act of worship, from the various rites of ablution to the confession of sins at the beginning of almost all the Christian liturgies. Only the pure of heart may be free and spontaneous.

The rubric of spontaneity does not require us to "be spontaneous," almost as if it were asking us to "keep smiling" as we follow instructions. It would not make sense to order us to "Be spontaneous, do it willingly!" It is not a mere pastoral suggestion to help us to conform better to the prescribed rites. It is the conviction that the *daimon*, the Spirit, concelebrates with us and allows us to introduce a vital interaction between all the elements of worship so that the nigrics may construct their corresponding rubrics in a concrete situation, and vice versa.

If the nigrics say, for example, "Accept our gifts," "Let us rejoice!" or "Lift up your hearts," the rubrics must give appropriate expression to the meanings of these nigrics; should the nigrics speak of courage, peace, or brotherhood, it would clearly be strange, to say the least, for the rubrics not to meaningfully express these attitudes, and for diversities or injustices to be ignored, or nurtured, in the very heart of the assembly. Attitudes of this type are also part of the rubrics of liturgy in a secular age.

If the rubrics, on the other hand, lead us to express ourselves through gestures, singing, or any other kind of action (including those of a social nature), spontaneity requires that such actions are performed in full knowledge of their ever-transcendent meaning. Whether I am painting, working, dancing, or eating, all these actions will be manifestations of involved life as long as they are performed and experienced as something more than mere "non-transcendent" actions. If the rubrics tell me to "pour oil" over an icon, to "kiss" a sacred object, or to "light a

fire," I could not perform these acts spontaneously if through them I did not pay homage to the divinity, respect and love the creation, or allow into my life the incandescence of mystery.

It is not our task to work out how to apply the rubrics. The vitality of a religion depends largely on the polarity created between the rubrics and the nigrics. The Hindū and Buddhist East is living this intensely, and the Christian West is aware of it. Today the tendency is often to recognize an orientation—the freedom to choose from a set of alternatives in relation to the circumstances—rather than the prescriptive nature of many laws. We are reminded of the variety of liturgical anaphoras in the Orthodox Church, the many forms of worship in Protestant meetings, the new liturgical reform in the Roman Catholic Church, and so forth.

The rubric of spontaneity, nevertheless, involves much more than mere flexibility in choosing between different forms for the celebration of a rite. It implies, above all, harmony between the symbol and those who use it to symbolize that which in other forms would appear inexpressive. In terms of Scholastic theology, spontaneity means that true worship cannot be based exclusively on *opus operatum*, thereby neglecting *opus operantis*. In other words, spontaneity means that authentic worship is fully conscious of the fact that where there is no freedom and, therefore, spontaneous participation, there is no such worship, and that no trust in the power of the rite itself (*opus operatum*) can release those who perform the act from free and active involvement. No rite is effective in itself if it is not performed in close unity with man. In Christianity the effectiveness (*opus operatum*) of a rite depends on the action of Christ himself (*opus operantis Christi*).

The rubric of spontaneity reminds us how traditional it already was in the ancient Christian liturgies: all the rubrics, and also the nigrics, were merely suggestions, inspirations, incentives, starting points, models, and patterns that then had to be filled with flesh and blood, to be given life. They were not, therefore, strict rules to be followed in blind obedience even when they did not appear to make complete sense. Those taking part in worship must leave the sacrifice to go first and be reconciled with their brother, but the celebrant must also leave the liturgy and be reconciled with the people before leading public worship. To act otherwise would be pure hypocrisy. The priestly function consists specifically in preserving the balance between the indicativity and the normativity of the rubric. It is a dynamic balance that must be re-created each time and which depends on the cooperation of the nigric and the whole devotional ensemble, from the people to the divinity. Worship, as we said earlier, is a cosmotheandric operation.

#### *Universality*

The second rubric, that of *universality*, is closely linked to the first. The two, in fact, are inseparable. I believe we could venture to say that, in our time, any symbol that is unable to be universally accepted will not likely be considered as a natural symbol and, consequently, an ultimate symbol; such a symbol is of little use to worship. The spontaneous is human, and the human is universal.

One of the characteristics of the secular age is its need for universality. Moreover, part of the appeal of secularity itself derives from its being a symbol of this type. The secular age is neither Western nor Eastern, neither Christian nor Buddhist; it is universal. At the same time, however, in this very claim lies the weakness of secularity.

Every symbol that today only has meaning for a group of people is doomed to be limited and runs the risk of becoming sectarian and, therefore, inappropriate for worship, especially those forms that carry a need for universality.

The salvific action of Christ in which Christians believe is truly universal—or, in the words of a Council, "Just as there has been, there is and *there will* be no man whose nature has not been assumed by Christ, so there has been, there is and *there will* be no man for whom Christ did not die."<sup>3</sup> It is unlikely that a symbol that excluded someone and created any type of discrimination could be called a Christian symbol today or be considered suitable for true Catholic worship.

The dynamism that produces many of the changes in the current forms of worship is the new pursuit of universality. The symbols of the white civilization were once considered universal; today it is more than proven that this is not so. Latin or Sanskrit may have once been a symbol of universality, but they are no longer; not long ago, according to the colonial mentality, uniformity was also regarded as a symbol of universality, but this has ceased to be so; the Roman Church believed that centralization was the proof and sign of a universal church, but today this does not ring quite so true. The wind of universalization blows over the globe.

A universal symbol does not necessarily have to be abstract, without life and concreteness. Likewise, neither should we minimize the difficulty of finding or discovering universal symbols in these times of transition. When cultures lived separated in units and compartments, a certain belief in cultural universality was easier.

Our mentality is still provincial, yet, nevertheless, the integral development of humanity leads us toward a planetary context. Today, if it is to be universal, any symbol must have a planetary horizon. Neither white, nor Christian, nor male, nor democratic may, in themselves, be considered as universal values. No one (to give a concrete example) challenges the right of the first men on the moon to erect their country's flag; such an act, however, undoubtedly casts a shadow on the remarkable human enterprise that might have been a universal symbol. Until recently, God was also a universal symbol for most of humanity; today, "God" is no longer so. One proof of this is the reluctance of the three first astronauts on the moon to pronounce the name of God as they performed an action in the name of the entire human species. And in any dialogue between a presumed humanist and a person who professes to be religious, the former will insist on the fact that his supreme ideal (his God, as we might, in fact, call it) is greater, vaster, and therefore more valid than what he sees as the limited conception of a God of a single religion.

Another example is the ecological awareness and interest in the earth that is now rapidly expanding. In fact, we are realizing that not only are there still symbols that have meaning for man, but these symbols are also universal and genuinely religious. And, in this case, we can safely say that it is not a question of an animist or "primitive" return to the earth, but a new relationship with the whole of reality.

The symbolism of ontologic consciousness should not be confused with the more unconscious symbolism of the heteronomic period. In ontomony, consciousness is that which discovers its own symbolic nature, inasmuch as beings, like Being, are symbols. This symbolic consciousness is different from a precritical consciousness or a merely rational approach to reality.

In order to keep our thread of reasoning, however, let us just look at several universal symbols and distinguish them from those of a more specific nature.

Birth, death, procreation, eating, drinking, dancing, celebrating, painting, sculpting, and singing, as well as justice, love, hope, faith, knowledge, friendship, and so on, are universal values, even though they may and should be interpreted concretely.

<sup>3</sup> Council of Quierzy (853), *Enchiridion symbolorum* (Denzinger), 624. Elsewhere I have made the distinction (not the separation) between Christ and Jesus.

God, the church, and the empire (in its different forms) were also universal values within certain cultural boundaries. Today these have been substituted with values such as democracy, independence, literacy, education, and for some people, technology, science, standard of living, and so on. The task of a healthy pluralism is to find the "homeomorphic" equivalents of these values.

#### *Concreteness*

A third rubric, which completes the previous two, is *concreteness*. A symbol is such only if it is concrete and not an abstract idea. In this context, concreteness is not intended as a negation of the universal but as an incarnation in something that "grows" in us (the word comes from *concrescere*). The symbols of worship cannot be generalizations. They would have no convincing power or appeal, neither would they fulfill their purpose, which is to lead us forward, toward the deepest, the highest, the farthest, the most remote, or whichever metaphor we prefer to use.

It would, therefore, be poor service to a worshiping community to artificially replace symbols that we consider as obsolete with others that individually we believe to be more suitable. As past and present experiences have shown, the community would immediately transfer the ancient meanings to the new symbols. True symbols can neither be invented nor manipulated; they are both objective and subjective: if I do not recognize them as symbols, they are not so to me. Their original power was almost unbelievable. Take, for example, medicine, to which, in parts of Africa and Asia, the power and effectiveness of the old idols have been transferred. Not long ago one of my neighbors in India swallowed a medical prescription as if it were the medicine itself. Did not the surprising phenomenon of postwar Japan come about by transferring the worship of the emperor to that of the country's scientific development? The Spanish missionaries arriving in the Philippines did not destroy what they believed to be the superstitions of the islanders—they replaced idol worship with the veneration of the Christian saints, preserved the ancient festivities and customs, and sought to give them a Christian meaning. In other countries, the missionaries adopted the so-called *tabula rasa* approach. The results (regardless of how we may judge such methods) were evident: in the former case, the Christian message was implanted, while in the latter case it remained a foreign body.

Another example of the power of concreteness can be seen in the enormous influence of forms of worship and very particular techniques arriving in the West from the East. It is not so much Buddhist philosophy or Vedanta universalistic speculation that penetrate the areas of a Western world suffering from a lack of roots as a particular Tibetan sect or a concrete *yoga* technique. The opposite phenomenon is equally true: the appeal and penetration of the West in the areas of the Eastern world suffering from its own sacral and religious inflation is not so much scientific ideology or Marxist philosophy as concrete technologies and socialist practices. The dialect is always the natural language of man. The problem does not lie in compiling a general Esperanto but in discovering a true communion by which authentic communication may be made possible. And, I repeat, this task is not alien to the function of worship.

Emphasis should be placed on the need for an equal balance between universality and concreteness. If the former without the latter is sterile and powerless, the latter without the former is sectarian and partial. Wisdom demands that we learn to discover the concrete in the universal and universalize the concrete without losing ourselves in vague generalizations. Incarnation, understood as the manifestation of the Absolute in the relative, perhaps represents the most notable symbol.

### *Sincerity*

On the basis of these and other considerations, these first three rubrics may be grouped under one title; they may, in fact, be likened to the three strands in a braid, as we will see in discussing the rubric of *sincerity*.

Sincerity involves worshiping in spirit and in truth and represents a correspondence between the rubrics and the nigrics, the full significance of every act in truly symbolizing what we believe. Sincerity is always spontaneous and almost involuntary. We generally arrive at the conviction that something is true through a simple inner act that leads us to it, and not through any laborious and painstaking process of logical deduction. Even though the road is long and difficult, once we reach our destination we acquire such a clear knowledge of the truth that we forget the intermediate stages. If we are convinced of the truth of something we are able to combine universality with concreteness, which is impossible for those who observe from the outside. If we are convinced of the *truth* of something, we consider it universally valid. As long as it is a question of *our own* conviction it is limited to the horizon of our experience and, consequently, is truly concrete. And, since it is our *conviction*, we give our approval, which then becomes to us the incarnation of the truth.

In this rubric of sincerity I would include, lastly, the temporal dimension of truth. In other words, authentic worship must answer as much to the truth of the past as to that of the future (without forgetting, of course, that of the present). An attitude that is exclusively geared to the past would not be true. Equally false, however, would be an attitude negating the temporal constitution of man and seeking, with the pretext of spontaneity, to cover it all under the cloak of the present, ignoring all the other human dimensions. The truth is not merely man's travel companion but it is also itinerant, though its paths are not our own.

### *Continuity*

Another similar and equally important rubric is *continuity*, which could also be called the rubric of *tradition* or *evolution*. This does not mean immobility or traditionalism, but neither does it represent revolution or fracture. No form of worship today can disregard those of past centuries and assume it can start again from scratch—it would fall prey, paradoxically, to the worst kind of conservatorism.

Applied to Christianity, for example, this rubric says that every form of Christian worship (both in countries of ancient Christian tradition and in the many enclaves scattered throughout the world) must become integrated with existing forms while, at the same time, allowing for evolution, development, and change. The motivation of this necessity is not so much pastoral as theological. Christian worship is both memory and hope, and Christian faithfulness is geared both to the future and to the past. The speed with which changes must be introduced is another important problem, but this is not the place to discuss ecclesiastical politics. All we are attempting to do here is examine some of the rubrics that are essential to authentic worship in our time.

Continuity must not, however, be practiced exclusively in relation to one's own past. If Christian worship is to avoid isolation and sectarianism it has to establish, in one way or another, the continuity we have talked about with the forms of worship surrounding it, including those that are not part of the Christian tradition. History provides abundant proof of this necessity. The importance of this rubric today is emphasized, on one hand, by the existence of a certain rigidity, carried over from the past two or three centuries, and, on the other hand, by the challenge that the so-called secular world is launching against all

exclusivistic or particularistic forms of worship. It would be contradictory to pray *for* others and not *with* them. It would seem like the residue of a colonialistic and paternalistic attitude of praying *for* the "pagans" and not allowing them to pray *with* the faithful or not authorizing the latter to pray with the former, *using their prayers* if they are considered acceptable. There is no such thing as deep human communion without *communicatio in sacris*, as we said earlier. An example of this can be found in the extremely widespread dispute regarding whether it would be "expedient" or "appropriate" to introduce into Christian liturgy other sacred writings in addition to the Old and New Testaments. As usual, life and liturgy come before the law and purely speculative theology.

### *Orthopraxy*

Though it may seem paradoxical, I would like to emphasize the value of the rubrics and highlight their ontologic character by introducing a complementary category, that is, *orthopraxy*.

A reaction to rubricism easily runs the risk of becoming total anarchy by not accepting any rubric whatsoever. What we are defending here is the peculiar ontomony of rubrics, which means a real balance, without the rubrics "overbearing" and "tyrannizing" the nigrics, or vice versa, as if their function consisted in blindly following the content of the act of worship indicated.

Let us look at an example. The nigrics say, "May the Lord bless us," "Lift up your hearts," or "Let us offer each other brotherly peace." It is up to the rubrics to give concrete expression to the nigrics. Now, the doctrinal implications of this may be that Kṛṣṇa is Lord, that joy is the direct fruit of the Easter event, or that Islam is the source of true and lasting peace. In such cases, obviously, participation in the nigrics will not be possible for those who believe in their specific doctrinal content. But if the rubrics translate and express what the nigrics say through living symbols—of, let us say, self-confidence or of a particular service to our neighbor—without adhering explicitly to their doctrinal content, then people may spontaneously join in the *vaiṣṇava*, Christian, or Islamic worship and, by participating in the expressions of their brothers, may be at peace, dance, sing, pray, or work with them in their everyday life. This participation in the rubrics without a total acceptance of the nigrics is not, in fact, as strange as it may appear. In every religious manifestation that is truly popular and alive (which is also a criterion for its authenticity), the rubrics themselves have such splendor and power that the participants are almost never limited exclusively to the orthodox group. At any pilgrimage or folk festival in India, for example, there are also Christians, Hindūs, and Muslims, and they cannot be prevented from attending. The same applies to Christian festivals in the Middle East and the Buddhist celebrations in the Far East; and it is not by mere coincidence that during the Eucharistic Congress of Mumbai, several years ago, hundreds of Hindūs received communion every day and no one dared forbid it. The ritual has a value in itself, and this is a fact that must not be overlooked.

We should not forget that worship concerns not so much the theologian as an intellectual, as the believer and the complete man as a man, and that we cannot stop life, nor can we artificially or intellectually limit the deepest needs of man.

Acceptance of this fact may provide us with some guidelines to help us avoid disorder and anarchy by establishing rules for the rubrics without belittling the freedom of the participants.

The modern forms of worship should allow for the participation of those who do not share the orthodoxy of the believers, accepting the broader rules of the game formulated in the rubries. This is a delicate yet inevitable problem.

*The New "Nigris"*

Let us begin with three significant quotes.

The first is by Tertullian: "Temples and tombs, we detest both equally; we know no kind of altar, we adore no kind of image, we offer no sacrifice."<sup>4</sup> The second is taken from *Vie arabe de Pacôme*: "When the monks went to seek permission from the bishop of Diopolis to build a church at Phbow, close to their monastery, they referred to the church as a hall of festivities."<sup>5</sup> Lastly, a few words spoken by the Buddha to a Hindu *Brahmin* as he prepared to celebrate a certain ritual:

I lay no wood for fires on altars;  
Only within burneth the fire I kindle.  
Ever my fire burns; ever tense and ardent  
I, Arahant, work out the life that is holy.<sup>6</sup>

Neither temples, nor tombs, nor altars; only a hall for celebrations, only a burning heart.

We will not discuss here to what extent early Christianity was so iconoclastic and antiritualistic as to disregard the temple (and, consequently, God, because he who has seen Christ has seen the Father, whom no one can see), the tombs (and, therefore, any idea of a private survival after death, because eternal life is knowing Christ and the kingdom of God is within us), and the altar (and, consequently, sacrifices, because the sacrifice of Christ was one and sufficient and unrepeatable). Neither is this the place to examine to what extent Buddhism, as a religion with its creed and its rites, may represent a betrayal of the pure message of Buddha, who did not want man to dwell on intermediaries or lucubrations, all useless impediments in his human pilgrimage. Nor may we hypothesize here as to whether all these things had been introduced surreptitiously for the purpose of satisfying humanity's thirst for the tangible and the visible. I would just like to suggest that, despite the many forms of worship that Christianity and Buddhism have developed over the centuries, they are not bound to any of them; just as they have been expressed in every age through contextual religious forms, they will also be able to find expression in secular forms or other appropriate sacred rites. This derives not from a desire for imitation or accommodation but from an inner dynamism seeking incarnation. Only the transcendent may become incarnate in any situation. And, I would hasten to add, such dynamism is also found in other religions.

However, today we are in need of a theological anthropology that is capable of giving form and meaning to the current content of worship and its expression.

For the sake of their anthropological value I would like now to summarize the basic acts of worship, using a traditional and ancient model.

*Devotion (Bhakti)*

*Devotion*, in all its forms, is a fundamental dimension of worship. Man is an emotional and sensitive being; he needs to express his impulses and his desires to overcome, in one way

<sup>4</sup> *De spectaculis* 13: "Nec minus tempa quam monumenta despuiimus, neutram aram novimus, neutram effigiem adoramus, non sacrificamus."

<sup>5</sup> *Vie arabe de Pacôme*, French translation by E. Amelinars, p. 567, in A. Veilleux, *La liturgie dans le cenobitisme pachomien*, Rome (pro manuscripto) 1967, f. 200 (Ph.D. thesis, Institute of Liturgy of the Pontificio Collegio Sant'Anselmo). St. Pachomius (290-ca. 346): founder of cenobitism, lived in northern Egypt; his rule profoundly influenced the evolution of monastic life.

<sup>6</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* I.169.

or another, his limits and inadequacies. Life without love is not a human life. Every form of love, praise, recognition, adoration, and celebration belongs to this category. Having said this, it still remains to be judged which forms are the most suitable for our secular society—yet this is a question that lies outside the limits of our essay on the principles of secular liturgy.

I would like, however, to emphasize the extreme importance of the arts, especially music. It is impossible for our being to develop fully if we neglect not only our sensitivity but also our artistic vein. It is a widely accepted fact that in almost all cultures the arts have had a sacred origin connected with worship. It is clearly not a question now of bringing the arts back into the sanctuary, but rather of developing a complete form of human worship capable of expressing man's integration into total reality.

#### *Knowledge (Jñāna)*

*Knowledge* is the second fundamental dimension of worship. Man is an intellectual being. He strives to know, to study, to face facts and problems, to discuss, to "dialogue," and to decipher the mystery of reality. Today the possibilities of integrating knowledge into acts of worship are enormous. Any word can, in some way, be a revelation. Knowledge also includes contemplation, and so it implies silence, peace, and awareness of everything that exists.

I would also like to emphasize the importance of knowledge for worship. Too often we are given the impression that worship has nothing to do with the needs of intelligence, thus confining science and also theology to the status of auxiliary sciences. If dance is part of the whole act of worship, intuition is to no lesser degree an essential part of the human being and must also be incorporated into worship.

#### *Action (Karma)*

*Action* is the other dimension of worship. It does not refer only to internal acts or actions geared to sacred and independent transcendence; it is also related to the present activities of man on earth. Even the important category of sacrifice should be included in this context. The construction of the city of men coincides with the construction of the city of God when we realize that the movement of incarnation, by which transcendence is related to immanence, is, in fact, continued by every action that renews this fundamental act of human and cosmic existence.

Once again the emphasis should be placed on the liturgical activity as *consecratio mundi* (to use a formula that was fashionable up until a few years ago). Perhaps one of man's most important activities today consists in total and personal consecration in favor of those persons, groups, nations, or races that, in one way or another, need collaboration in order to attain a more just and human life. Worship is not an aristocratic act or an intellectual and artistic luxury that, at most, could be justified as a source of strength and inspiration for other activities that man feels are his duty to engage in. Worship implies action just as much as the other two elements we have mentioned. We might say that *consecratio mundi* is the very task of the so-called liberation theology. And it is precisely in the sphere of devotional action that authentic liberation theology finds its place, after being so often regarded (and criticized) either as a mere intellectual activity or, on the other hand, as no more than revolutionary subversion. Liberation theology is part of the same liberating action that is born of the same devotional nature of the human being. Human liberation is more than a technique; it is a liturgy.

According to another traditional formulation I might also have said that worship must include *beauty, truth, and good*. Without a harmonious integration of these three elements, worship will never fully satisfy the needs of man's nature. Man is a devotional being because it is in worship, in the fullest sense of the word, that he can wholly fulfill the meaning of his life.

While the anthropological formulation we have mentioned is not completely false, it is necessary to work out a theology of worship that is based on these three points, keeping the right balance between them. Worship would offer, therefore, an opportunity to express all the sentiments of gratitude, regret, love, and admiration that we hold in our hearts. Celebration is, in short, an essential part of worship. Moreover, it would be easy to place emphasis on the positive sentiments of the human heart, and then traditional forms of spirituality might perhaps stop regarding man's achievements with suspicion and considering him (albeit unconsciously) as a rival to God. The *magnalia Dei* are always carried out *per homines*, and we should not worry about whether these men are part of our own tribe or not. It is not a question of being clever and saying, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is on the moon"; we need to recognize that in every human action there is always something greater and more profound involved, for better or for worse. Each act of worship must represent a deepening of our feelings, a realization of the enormous importance of all things. From this point of view, worship could be described as being one of the acts through which we truly enter the world of the spirit.

We must also mention the intellectual and scientific aspect of worship. Worship is not, in fact, just singing, praying, pleading for mercy, or feeling emotionally uplifted. It is also (and, for many, most of all) studying, contemplating, and being silent, both in public and in private. The untiring and bountiful scientific efforts of the world today must be assimilated or integrated into an act of worship.

Worship, lastly, consists in "doing"—working and collaborating on the construction of the city of men, aware that this city has a dimension that transcends that which is most evident at first sight, that "the city of God" is not a second city but a real world whose outward appearance is, precisely, our visible world. To build, to discover, to create, to accelerate the process or coming of the kingdom is equally the function of worship. To Christian sacramental theology as a whole, this would represent an immense field of exploration. In practically all religions, in fact, the classic conception of sacrifice is intimately related to this aspect of worship. The highest function of worship consists in making sure that the whole world fulfills its destiny, in re-creating it and allowing time, or *saeculum*, to run its course thanks to the efforts of man, actively engaged in the karmic existence that, far from passively enduring it, he forges.

#### *Worship in a Secular Age*

As a final word, it must be said that no discussion on secularity should overshadow its importance. In all genuine and profound worship there exists an inherent dimension that draws on the roots of the secular, which is the very heart of the world. In traditional language it has often been referred to as the *ontological* or *vicarious* aspect of worship. We could also speak of the *cosmic/personal* aspect or the *cosmotheandric* dimension of worship. No genuine act of worship can be celebrated in an individual or solipsistic way. Worship, as we have said, is basically neither collective nor individualistic; it is personal. By person we mean that center, that real intersection of karmic lines that ignites a spark of consciousness.

Concentrating exclusively on this point, we could describe this aspect of worship as the act by which the person cultivates his center and participates, consequently, in the whole of reality—by which he is united, on the deepest level, with his brothers and enters into

communion with the entire universe. Worship is the act by which the person overcomes not only selfishness and isolation but also the fruitless activism and sterile superficiality of an unauthentic existence. In our modern times the inflation of information is achieving the opposite effect, going so far as to paralyze normal reactions because it makes it objectively impossible to "know" all that happens, or to know how much has been said on a given subject, or to fully embrace any field of the human sphere, or to respond to the barrage of internal and external stimuli. Little by little, our vital and psychological need for this aspect of worship that places us in communion with the center of the human and the cosmos, and also the divine existence, becomes increasingly great. Worship is not a substitute or a consolation for the fact that I am not part of the centers in which the decisions are made for governing the world; neither does it claim to be able to influence them through some sort of white magic. On the other hand, however, the act of worship places man both within his own center and in that of cosmic existence. True worship does not dream of "having influence" because it knows it is on a level where influence is meaningless. True worship only begins when we have resisted the temptation of seeking to conquer the whole world by "worshiping" an idol. It is not necessary for the idol to have the form of Satan, or for the "whole world" to be Jerusalem. The "power" of worship does not lie in erecting a new defense against the figure of the powerful, but in taking away his power by helping him to discover that his "power" is not real inasmuch as he considers it "his." On a liturgical level of existence, nothing and no one is to be feared.

How should a man of today, living in his age (*saeculum*), express his faith? This may be a concrete way of tackling the problem.

The principle of complementarity, which we mentioned earlier, may find here its most fitting application. Taking into account the persons and ages which have insisted almost exclusively on the supramundane orientation of worship, the secular man's worship must place emphasis on serving the world. Bearing in mind also those for whom the transcendent aspect has degenerated into a mere projection of personal impotence, secular man's worship should express this inner, constitutive aspiration of man toward something that lies constantly beyond him. To those who are oppressed by the world and find themselves entangled in the net of immediate and purely temporal things, worship should accentuate the *sussum corda* of true transcendence, which is not a loophole, but rather the realization of man's supreme condition. To those also who consider themselves secularists, humanists, and atheists, authentic worship should preserve its meaning, because the act of worship does not argue about conceptions, opinions, or ideologies, but expresses the deepest aspirations of the human being, not with euphemisms or loopholes but through real and creative manifestations. Not all the world that refuses to worship God would refuse to join in a manifestation that expresses the glory and splendor of all or part of creation (by whatever name we choose to call it).

The cosmotheandric nature of liturgy demands this balance, which is far from being a dull mediation or compromise between two dangers of our time. On the contrary, the extremes are only incomplete versions of the whole cosmotheandric character of reality.

I do not question whether our age is secularized or not. Secularity represents the recovery of the sacramental structure of reality, the awareness of the fact that one truly full human life is liturgical because it is the very expression of the mystery of existence. Man is the priest of the world, the cosmic sacrament, and today we are more inclined to accept this truth also: man is the prophet of our universe, the celebrant of the sacrament of life and the ambassador of the kingdom of the Spirit. In this context, worship does not appear as the evasion or inhibition of our ideals and ambitions, neither as an excuse for inaction or the omission of our immediate duty, but as the integration of all life's dimensions, and as a

constant "counterweight"—either material when we are overly spiritual, or spiritual when the material prevails. Worship is neither a self-serving act carried out in the hope of receiving from a *deus ex machina* what we cannot obtain by ourselves, nor the superfluous action of a spiritual aristocracy that sings, gives thanks, or meditates while the majority works, suffers, or simply struggles. On the contrary, worship (unlike theology, which is the conscious passage from *mythos* to *lógos*, from unmediated beliefs to self-critically and intellectually formulated convictions) represents the union of *mythos* and *lógos*: a marriage that can only be consummated in the *spirit*. Worship is not the negation of the human condition, but rather its acceptance. Through worship, our human condition is accepted realistically, not ignored or despised. Worship represents neither evasion nor condescension, but that human (and, I would add, cosmotheandric) act for which faith, hope and love are required. This is the act that, by acceptance of our human condition, sets us on the road to redemption through the transfiguration (which the Christian knows to be visible only at times, as in the case of Mount Tabor) that illuminates and sustains the immense experience of perceiving oneself as a cosmotheandric being.

As far as *how* it may be done, this is one of the reasons I have collected these ideas together here, only to have them scattered to the four winds.

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- Other works relating to areas which, though closely connected, are generally less well known to "liturgists."
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## GLOSSARY

*All foreign-language terms are Sanskrit unless otherwise specified.*

**advaita:** nondualism (*a-dvaita*). Spiritual intuition that sees ultimate reality as neither monistic nor dualistic. The recognition that the merely quantitative problem of the one and the many in dialectical reasoning does not apply to the realm of ultimate reality. The latter, in fact, possesses polarities that cannot be divided into multiple separate units; not to be confused with *monism*.

**agnihotra:** the daily fire sacrifice performed morning and evening in all homes of the high castes, which consists in an oblation of milk sprinkled on the fire.

**aporia** (Gr.): difficulty that prevents one from going beyond reason, dead end. (*Logomythical aporia*: conflict among *logos*.)

**asvamedha:** horse sacrifice. One of the grandest and most solemn Vedic rites.

**ātmavādic perspective:** advaita point of view.

**autonomy:** conception of the world according to which the universe and the human being are considered to be *sui iuris*, that is, self-determining and self-determinable, each being its own law.

**avatāra:** "descent" of the divine (from *ava-tṛ*, descend), the "incarnations" of Viṣṇu in various animal and human forms. Traditionally, there are ten *avatāra*: *matsya* (the fish), *kūrma* (the tortoise), *varāha* (the wild boar), *narasiṁha* (the lion-man), *vāmana* (the dwarf), Paraśurāma (Rāma with the axe), Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, and Kalkin at the end of time. In general, any personal manifestation of the Divinity, descended into this world in human form; descent as antonomasia.

**Bhakti:** devotion, submission, love for God, personal relationship with God, devotional mysticism. One of the paths of salvation through union with the divinity.

**candāla [paria]:** one who is outside the social orders.

**catachronic interpretation:** projection of modern-day categories of comprehension for grasping events of another order of things.

**comunicatio in sacris** (Lat.): "communion in the sacred."

**darśana:** from the root *drś*, to see, to observe, hence vision, sight; philosophy, Weltanschauung. In a religious context it means the vision of a saint or God, hence also meeting, audience, visit.

**dharma:** cosmic order, justice, duty, religious law, religious and social observances transmitted by tradition; "religion" as a collection of practices and laws. That which holds the world together.

**dharmakāya:** mystical body of *dharma* in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

*diabolion* (Gr.): diabolic aspect.

*diachronic supplement*: desire for the future.

*eudaemonism*: moral doctrine that identifies virtue with happiness.

*diachronic hermeneutic*: represents mediation between the temporal distances of the cultural history of mankind, though generally centered on a single tradition.

*diatopic hermeneutic*: the effort made to understand others without presuming that they have the same basic self-knowledge as ourselves.

*eternity*: heterogeneous reality in relation to time, totally independent from time, incomparable and immeasurable, having no relation to temporal reality. The specific character of divinity.

*hermeneutics, hermeneutic*: "the art of interpretation"; the theory and method of understanding and interpreting writings.

*heteronomy*: conception of the world based on the hierarchical structure of reality: the laws that govern each sphere of existence come from a higher authority and are responsible for the workings of everything that exists.

*Indra*: the great divine warrior who wins all battles in favor of his worshipers, both against opposing clans (*dayu* or *dāsa*) and against demons such as *Vṛtra* and *Vala*. His virile power is irresistible and is the *soma* that provides him with the energy needed for his mighty exploits. He is the liberator of the compelling forces; he releases the waters and the light. His weapon is the *vajra*, the lightning bolt.

*jñāna*: knowledge (from the root *jñā-*, to know), intuition, wisdom; frequently the highest intuitive comprehension, the attaining of *ātman* or *brahman*. One of the paths of liberation, wisdom.

*kaliyuga*: the current negative era; the era corresponding to the original sin.

*kāma*: the creative power of desire, personified as the God of love; one of the *puruṣārtha*.

*karma* or *karman*: "act, deed, action," from the root *kṛ*, to act, to do; originally the sacred action, sacrifice, rite, later also moral act. The result of all actions and deeds according to the law of *karman* that regulates actions and their results in the universe. Later also connected with rebirth, it indicates the link between the actions carried out by a subject and his destiny in the cycle of deaths and rebirths.

*karmatic*: pertaining to *karma*, deriving from *karma*.

*kosmo-legein* (Gr.): the manifestation of the cosmos to us.

*kṣatriya*: member of the second Hindū caste, that of the nobility.

*logomyth*: "the myth of the logos," as opposed to *mythology*, "the logos of the myth."

*mimāṃsā, mimāṃsaka*: one of the six classic systems of Indian philosophy which deals mainly with the rudiments and the rules for interpreting the Vedic writings. From the root *mam*, to think. The two main schools are the *pūrvamimāṃsā*, which focuses on the ritual interpretation of the *Veda* (see *karmakāṇḍin*) and the *uttaramimāṃsā*, which gives a philosophical and spiritual interpretation.

*morphological hermeneutic*: deciphers the treasures (Gr. *morphe*, form or value) of a specific culture, a single tradition.

*mytheuma* (G.): myth theme; what corresponds to myth.

*mythologoumenon* (Gr.): that which speaks of the myth.

*mythophany*: the appearance of the myth.

*mythopoietic* (period): generating period of myths (*mythopoein*: to imagine or compose fairy tales, legends).

*mythos* (Gr.): the horizon of presence that does not require further inquiry.

*nigrics*: the text, the actual content of the rite. In liturgical books the text is written in black (hence the neologism), as opposed to *rubrics* (written in red).

*noema* (Gr.): in the phenomenology of Husserl, the unit of intellectual perception.

*noesis noesos* (Gr.): "the thinking of thinking," characteristic of the pure act or the Aristotelian prime mover.

*nous* (Gr.): mind, thought, intellect, reason.

*ontonony*: intrinsic connection of an entity in relation to the totality of Being, the constitutive order (*nomos*) of every being as Being (*on*), harmony that allows the interdependence of all things.

*orthopraxy*: correct conduct, ontologically full conduct, action that brings salvation, ultimately, sacrificial action.

*pisteuma* (Gr.): from *pisteuei*, to believe; that which the believer believes, the intentional sense of religious phenomena, the homeomorphic equivalent of *noema*.

*protomytheme*: primordial myth.

*puruṣamadha*: human sacrifice.

*rājasūya*: royal consecration.

*rta*: debt, duty, obligation.

*r̥si*: seer, sage, wise man; the poet-sages to whom the *Veda* were revealed. Regarded as a special class of beings, superior to men and inferior to the Gods. According to one tradition there were seven *r̥si*, probably the seven priests with whom Manu performed the first sacrifice and the seven poet judges in the assembly. Their identification with the names of ancient seers and with the stars of the Ursa Major occurred later (*Brahmaṇa*).

*r̥ta*: cosmic and sacred order, sacrifice as a universal law, also truth; the ultimate, dynamic, and harmonious structure of reality.

*rubrics*: definition of the external acts that accompany the interior acts of worship, expression of its content. Rubrics are written in red in liturgical books, hence their name.

*sacrificio vedico* (sp.): sacrifice compliant with the doctrine and ritual of the *Veda*.

*samnyāsin*: renunciant, ascetic; pertaining to the fourth stage or period of life (*āśrama*), to some the superior stage.

*samsāra*: the impermanent phenomenic world and the condition of identification with it, the temporal existence, the cycle of births and deaths, of conditioned existences; state of dependence and slavery.

*Samyutta Nikaya*: Buddhist sacred book.

*sandhya*: devotion or ritual worship celebrated every day at certain hours by Hindūs, corresponding to the Christian lauds and vespers.

*soma*: the sacrificial plant from which the juice of the *soma* is extracted through elaborate rituals, hence the sap or drink of immortality (*amṛta* is another name for *soma*); a divinity ("Soma the king"). *Soma* was used ritually for entering a higher state of consciousness. Later it also took on the meaning of "moon."

*sūtra*: lit. "yarn, thread of a fabric." Short aphorism in a sacred text that generally cannot be understood without a comment (*bhāṣya*). The literature of the *sūtra* is part of the *śmr̄ti* and is conceived to be easily memorised.

*synchronic complement*: desire for the present.

*tapas*: lit. heat; hence inner energy, spiritual fervor or ardor, austerity, ascesis, penitence. One of the forms of primordial energy, along with *kāma*.

*techniculture*: the current secondary human plane, which is neither agrarian nor technological, but *technicultural*. Techniculture is neither agri-culture nor techno-logy, but an attempt to combine the two.

*tempiernity*: nonseparation between time and eternity, experience of the present in all its depth, containing not only the past in potency and the future in hope, but also eternity and temporality.

*temporality*: human time (neither eternity nor indiscriminate time), particular way of existence, unification of human existence in which the past joins the present, in which the present brings the past with its impulse toward the future.

*temporacity*: general mode of the duration of beings, their way of being in the world, a quality of their existence, that which allows them to continue existing.

*theandric*: "divine-human" (from Gr. *theos* and *aner*).

*Varuṇa*: one of the main Gods of the *Veda*; *Varuṇa* is king, commander, and supervisor of the moral conduct of men. He is Lord of *rta*, cosmic and moral order. He is often invoked together with *Mitra*. Due to his close association with water he later became known simply as a God of water, the Lord of the ocean.

*Veda*: lit. knowledge (from the root *vid-*, to know); the sacred knowledge incorporated in the *Veda* as the entire body of "Sacred Scriptures" (although originally they were only passed on orally). Strictly speaking, "*Veda*" refers only to the *Śāṅkhītā* (*Rg-veda*, *Yajur-veda*, *Sāma-veda*, *Atharva-veda*); generally, however, *Brāhmaṇa* and *Upaniṣad* are also included. In the plural it refers to the four *Veda*.

*vedānta*: lit. end of the *Veda*, that is, the *Upaniṣad* as the climax of Vedic wisdom. In the sense of *Uttaramimāṃsā* or *Vedāntavāda*, a system of Indian philosophy (Advaita-vedānta, Dvaita-vedānta, and so on) based on the *Upaniṣad*, which teaches a spiritual interpretation of the *Veda*; one of the last schools of Hindu philosophical thought, of which the most renowned representatives include Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Madhva.

*Yoga*: from the root *yuj-*, to yoke, to join, to unite, to prepare, to fix, to concentrate; union, method of mental, physical, and spiritual union, concentration, and contemplation, which also uses bodily posture (*āsana*), breathing control (*prāṇāyāma*), and spiritual techniques. *Yoga* appears to be an extremely ancient Indic practice that was developed into a system by Patañjali (*Yoga-sūtra*) and made to correspond to the philosophical system *Sāṃkhya*. *Yoga* as a method has become a fundamental factor in practically all religions of Indic origin.

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An international authority on spirituality, the study of religions, and intercultural dialogue, Raimon Panikkar made intercultural and dialogical pluralism one of the hallmarks of his research, becoming a master "bridge builder," tireless in the promotion of dialogue between Western culture and the great Oriental Hindū and Buddhist traditions.

Born in 1918 in Barcelona of a Spanish Catholic mother and an Indian Hindū father, he was part of a plurality of traditions: Indian and European, Hindū and Christian, scientific and humanistic.

Panikkar held degrees in chemistry, philosophy, and theology, and was ordained a Catholic priest in 1946. He delivered courses and lectures in major European, Indian, and American universities.

A member of the International Institute of Philosophy (Paris), of the permanent Tribunal of the Peoples (Rome), and of the UNESCO Commission for Intercultural Dialogue, he also founded various philosophical journals and intercultural study centers. He held conferences in each of the five continents (including the renowned Gifford Lectures in 1988–1989 on "Trinity and Atheism").

Panikkar received international recognitions including honorary doctorates from the University of the Balearic Islands in 1997, the University of Tübingen in 2004, Urbino in 2005, and Girona in 2008, as well as prizes ranging from the Premio Menéndez Pelayo de Humanidades for his book *El concepto de naturaleza* in Madrid in 1946 to the Premio Nonino 2001 a un maestro del nostro tempo in Italy.

Panikkar lived in Tavertet in the Catalonian mountains, where he continued his contemplative experience and cultural activities from 1982 until his death on August 26, 2010. There he founded and presided over the intercultural study center Vivarium. Panikkar published more than fifty books in various languages and hundreds of articles on the philosophy of religion, theology, the philosophy of science, metaphysics, and Indology.

From the dialogue between religions to the peaceful cohabitation of peoples; from reflections on the future of the technological society to major work on political and social intelligence; from the recognition that all interreligious dialogue is based on an intrareligious dialogue to the promotion of open knowledge of other religions, of which he is a mediator; from his penetrating analysis of the crisis in spirituality to the practice of meditation and the rediscovery of his monastic identity; from the invitation of *colligite fragmenta* as a path toward the integration of reality to the proposal of a new innocence, Panikkar embodies a personal journey of fulfillment.

Among his most important publications with Orbis are: *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (1973); *Worship and Secular Man* (1973); *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1981); *The Silence of God* (1989); *The Rhythm of Being* (1989); *Cosmotheandric Experience* (1993); and *Christophany* (2004).

